INFORM USA STANDARDS AND QUALITY INDICATORS FOR PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

Version 10.0

Published: July 2024

Published by: Inform USA

Inform USA (formerly the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS)) at informusa.org) is a professional 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 Inform USA products and services, contact:

4800 Hampden Lane STE 200
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
United States
240.744.4742
info@informusa.org
informusa.org

Printed in the United States of America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INFORM USA STANDARDS AND QUALITY INDICATORS OVERVIEW

The Inform USA Standards Committee is pleased to release the 10th edition of the *Inform USA Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral*.

The Inform USA **Standards** provide guideposts to quality and define expected **practices** within the field of Information and Referral (I&R). **Quality Indicators** (QIs) provide concrete examples of processes or outcomes that can determine quality.

I&R services help bring individuals and families together with the programs within the human service delivery system. I&R programs develop working relationships with human service providers and larger service systems to advance an integrated service delivery system. They also facilitate long-range planning by tracking service requests and identifying gaps and duplications in communities.

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

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**. Database Curators create, maintain, and disseminate information on the **programs** and **services** delivered within the **human services** sector.

The Standards are the foundation for **credentialing** programs, whether it is **Inform USA Accreditation** for I&R programs, or **Inform USA Certification** for individual practitioners as either **Certified Community Resource Specialist (CRS)**, **Certified Community Resource Specialist - Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D)**, and/or **Certified Resource Specialist – Database Curators (CRS-DC)**.

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, provincial, territory and/or federal levels; include provisions for the responsible use of technology; describe the role of I&R services in times of disaster; and outlines ongoing **quality assurance** processes.

Structure of the Standards document: *High-quality, standards-driven I&R services happen when all parts of the organization work together to provide the best experience for each person in need. This involves clear* ***policies*** *and/or* ***procedures****, quality training and supervision, attentive contact handling and accurate resource curation. To highlight this concept, when applicable, the quality indicators are grouped into 3 areas*:

- ***Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)*** *for the administrative organization which includes considerations regarding policies or procedures*
- ***Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)*** *for the service's management activities including supervision/coaching/training*
- ***Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)*** *for the daily practice/frontline service provision which focuses on staff/volunteer expectations*

Where do I go for more detailed information about how to implement these Standards?

There are two other Inform USA resources to assist members who want to learn even more about how to apply the concepts outlined in the Standards:

- **Inform USA Accreditation** is the process by which I&R programs are evaluated against the industry Standards for information and referral. The Accreditation Manual is the guiding document that outlines the five phases of the process. It also contains requirements that must be met in order to achieve full accreditation.
- **Inform USA I&R Training Manual** references the Standards and has more in-depth content for training purposes. It can help I&R practitioners gain an understanding of how to put the Standards into practice. The Training Manual contains topics for discussion, role plays, and relevant concepts.

***Please note:** All bolded terms are electronically linked to either the **Appendices** (one for each section of the Standards, containing charts, tables, etc) or **Glossary of Terms** located at the end of the Standards.

INFORM USA STANDARDS
AND QUALITY INDICATORS

SECTION 1: SERVICE DELIVERY

Organizations that deliver Information and Referral services optimize access to community information and resources for all people. I&R services aim to provide accurate, comprehensive, and unbiased information in a non-judgmental manner. To empower informed choice, the I&R service provides non-partisan, non-ideological, and impartial information for available nonprofit, government, and for-profit services.

Standard 1: Information and Referral/Assistance Provision

Through one-to-one interactions with a Community Resource Specialist, the I&R service engages individuals by building **rapport**, actively listening, exploring needs and connecting people with appropriate information, **referrals**, and support.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

1.1 - The I&R service engages with individuals through interactions that follow the stages of the **I&R process** and records the **contacts** in a data system such as an **I&R software**.

1.2 - The I&R service provides multi-channel access (e.g., phone, email, **chatbot**, live chat, **text**, **video relay service**, **social media**, website, or other alternative access methods) to Information and Referral services.

- The preference is for inquiries to be handled in real-time/live-answer.
- Efforts are made to ensure that its service is **accessible** from all channels within its coverage area.

1.3 - I&R services are provided during publicized service hours.

- The I&R service should strive for year-round, 24-hour availability. There should be staffing considerations made for individuals who need I&R services outside of publicized business hours.
- When after-hours or overflow coverage is provided by another organization, there is a formal, written agreement to ensure that the organization meets all Inform USA Service Delivery and **Resource Database** Standards and Quality Indicators.
- Alternative delivery options are acceptable (e.g. voicemail message with the phone number of another organization for after-hours assistance, **Interactive Voice Response (IVR)** that connects persons to another organization after hours, online resources providing information after hours).

1.4 - The I&R service is provided at no cost to individuals (e.g., toll-free access is provided to people living within the area served by the I&R). Individuals are responsible for cell phone minutes, landline fees, phone charges, and text charges.

1.5 - The I&R service ensures barrier-free access for individuals and groups who have diverse needs including access via applicable technology and/or communication methods for people with hearing or speech impairments, language access for individuals who speak languages other than English, and access for people with disabilities.

1.6 - Policies and procedures ensure that the privacy, **confidentiality**, and security of **Personal Identifiable Information (PII)** is protected as required by local, state, regional, provincial, territory and/or federal laws. These policies/procedures may include:

- Obtaining verbal or written consent prior to disclosing identifying information about individuals, their requests, and the information given to them and with whom this information can be shared.
- Circumstances under which the information may be required:
    - release of information is required by law or court order.
    - the presence or risk of serious harm to the individual or another person, and then communication may be only to those who must be informed in order to reduce harm or risk.
- Developing an internal document retention policy for all channels of communication with or without PII.
- Agreeing not to sell personal information gathered from its interactions with persons in need, regardless of what channel the request came on.
- Obtaining signed confidentiality forms from staff, visitors and others with access to confidential information to document their compliance.

1.7 - The I&R service has a procedure to address **challenging interactions**, which includes:

- identifying behaviors considered offensive or inappropriate.
- providing options for managing disruptive contacts.
- reviewing challenging interactions as needed and determining any necessary actions (e.g., procedural changes, staff training).

1.8 - The I&R service may engage in enhanced services after the initial I&R contact with the inquirer's permission (e.g., detailed eligibility screenings or **assessments**; prompting inquiries about their interest in additional resources; conducting initial case coordination; application assistance; and appointment setting). These services are clear in scope and expectations.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

1.9 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and **coaching** that Community Resource Specialists follow proper internal contact handling procedures.

1.10 - Regular training is provided regarding the key elements of the **I&R process**.

1.11 - The I&R service has a mechanism to document inquirer feedback (complaints and compliments) and uses the feedback to improve quality, training, and service expectations.

- There is a process to resolve complaints from individuals (i.e. related to customer satisfaction)
- There is a process to resolve complaints from community service agencies (i.e. related to the accuracy of referrals).

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

1.12 - Community Resource Specialists utilize training tools that include these overarching principles:

- applying **person-centered** techniques to identify the individual's strengths, needs, preferences, goals, values, and support the person's choices.
- using clear, jargon-free language, appropriate tone of voice, and positive inflections to convey compassion and empathy during the conversation.
- responding to each inquirer in a professional, non-judgmental, patient, **culturally-appropriate**, and timely manner.
- providing an explanation about why the information is being

requested and when relevant demographic information is being collected. Additional data (i.e. being collected for funders or other stakeholders) should be collected towards the end of any conversation.
- building rapport by actively listening to the individual so they feel heard and respected.

1.13 - Community Resource Specialists follow internal processes, documentation requirements, and training during each conversation.

1.14 - For staff that provide simultaneous **multi-channel services**, the Specialists should equally divide their attention based on the conversation flow, without compromising customer service. Specialists should balance productivity and the needs of individuals to achieve the best outcome for all conversations.

1.15 - Community Resource Specialists should adhere to all privacy, confidentiality, and security of PII requirements set by the organization.

Standard 2: Client Advocacy

The I&R service offers **client advocacy,** when necessary, to ensure that people receive the benefits and services for which they are eligible.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policy/Procedure)

2.1 - The I&R service has an advocacy policy that describes:

- the circumstances under which client advocacy should occur
- the need to obtain permission of the individual (i.e. **informed consent**)
- the conditions under which supervisory staff need to become involved

2.2 - The I&R service has a procedure for documenting acts of advocacy and their outcomes.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

2.3 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that Community Resource Specialists know when to engage in and how to document acts of advocacy.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

2.4 - When necessary, staff intervenes with permission of the person, to help individuals obtain needed services. They may make additional calls or take actions outlined in the organization/**agency**'s procedures, that support the person obtaining the necessary information or help.

2.5 - When the level of advocacy required is beyond the scope of the I&R's services or resources, the staff makes a referral to another organization that specializes in providing advocacy.

2.6 - Staff documents acts of advocacy and their outcomes.

Standard 3: Crisis Intervention

The I&R service is prepared to triage and address the immediate short-term needs of individuals who are experiencing a **crisis**.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

3.1 - The I&R service either provides **crisis intervention** services or has a prearranged agreement and documented **protocols** with a **crisis hotline service**.

3.2 - The I&R service has crisis intervention procedures that include guidance for:

- specific types of emergencies.
- when to complete a **safety risk assessment**.
- taking protective measures for individuals in **endangerment** situations.
- when to access 911 or other emergency rescue services.
- responding to individuals who wish to remain anonymous yet require direct intervention.
- debriefing following a crisis interaction, when needed.

3.3 - The I&R service has protocols and tools in place to support connecting with 911 or other emergency services regardless of the incoming channel including:

- Caller ID.
- call tracing arrangement with the telephone company.
- identification of an IP address.
- a separate external line, available for initiating **rescue protocols** without interrupting the crisis conversation.

3.4 - In cases of suspected child abuse, elder abuse, or disabled adult abuse, the I&R service has protocols that comply with prevailing legislation regarding **mandatory reporting** and they work with appropriate entities to complete a report when required.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

3.5 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that Community Resource Specialists have the skills to:

- facilitate a crisis conversation regardless of the incoming channel.
- recognize when the inquirer is experiencing a life-threatening

crisis and how to intervene.

- recognize when the inquirer is experiencing a non-life-threatening crisis and how to navigate the conversation.
- recognize the warning signs of people at imminent risk of suicide, violence, or victimization (abuse/neglect, domestic violence, and risk of homicide or self-harm) whether the risk is explicitly stated or implicit.
- follow the organization's rescue protocol regarding when to access 911 or other emergency personnel to request that they intervene.
- ensure the inquirer is safe and can have a conversation before continuing a screening or assessment.
- de-escalate and stabilize the inquirer prior to making a referral or transfering the conversation.
- build rapport during life-threatening conversations by helping individuals talk about their feelings as part of the assessment and problem-solving stages of the conversation.
- attempt to keep the inquirer engaged during the referral or rescue process.
- document crisis conversations.

3.6 - Community Resource Specialists are required to participate in annual crisis intervention professional development training to upgrade existing and learn new skills.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff Expectations)

3.7 - In conversations involving risk of suicide or homicide, staff understand the circumstances under which a safety risk assessment is required. Risk assessments are documented and include a description of specific actions taken.

3.8 - In conversations about domestic violence or other endangerment situations, staff take special precautions to safeguard the inquirer's identity and all aspects of their interaction.

3.9 - During non-life-threatening crisis conversations, staff should assess individuals' immediate needs and connect them with a crisis intervention service for assistance. A connection is made in accordance with the established crisis service protocol, including **warm transfers** when possible.

3.10 - Community Resource Specialists follow the protocol for addressing individuals who wish to remain anonymous yet require rescue.

3.11 - Staff document crisis intervention conversations and outcomes.

Standard 4: Follow-Up

Follow-up is conducted to benefit individuals and confirm whether or not their needs have been met, and if not, why. For persons who are at risk and/or vulnerable, the I&R service should attempt follow-up to ensure they received the necessary support and resources. Follow-up data can be used to improve service delivery and update community assessments. **Please note: follow-up is different from customer satisfaction surveys.*

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

4.1 - The I&R service has a follow-up policy that addresses:

- populations or situations requiring follow-up, including priority situations.

- guidance regarding the time frame of the follow-up call (# of days before the return call) based on the original need of the individual.
- how many attempts shall be made to reach the individual before the attempts end.
- follow-up will be attempted using the contact method preferred by the individual (e.g. call, text).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

4.2 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that follow-up conversations:

- are properly documented (whether the service was received or needs remain unmet).
- are reviewed for clarity and quality.
- feedback is provided to staff, when needed.

4.3 - Community Resource Specialists are updated regarding changes to processes and **data collection**.

4.4 - Follow-up reports are created that can help identify **service gaps** in the community and are shared with various stakeholders for systems advocacy. Data should be aggregated and include all sources/methods of collection.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

4.5 - Community Resource Specialists adhere to the established follow-up protocols when scheduling and conducting a follow-up on any service channel.

4.6 - Follow-up is conducted only with the permission of the individual and never compromises an individual's safety.

4.7 - If the individual has not received services or their need has not been met, the I&R service engages in **problem-solving** and attempts new or additional appropriate referrals.

Standard 5: Independent Service Delivery Methods

The I&R service provides **independent service delivery methods** that allow access to and retrieval of community resource information for the general public and other human services professionals. These methods provide an alternative to one-to-one interaction with Community Resource Specialists.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

5.1 - Information about how to connect with a Community Resource Specialist is provided along with independent service delivery methods. 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.

5.2 - The I&R service may use menu-driven **IVR**, leading to pre-recorded audio information during high call volume periods (e.g., disasters, staffing shortages, proactive marketing campaigns).

5.3 - Following local, state, provincial and/or federal laws, the I&R service offers the public the ability to opt-in to text notifications for community resource information.

5.4 - Social media platforms may be used to inform the public about significant information or changes to community services. The I&R

service has protocols around posting content and ensures the information is vetted and user-friendly.

5.5 - The organization's website contains the following:

- an easy-to-remember URL.
- design elements that promote accessibility for persons with disabilities and comply with applicable local, state, regional, provincial, territory, and/or federal laws.
- **meta-tagging** and other techniques to ensure Search-Engine Optimization (SEO) produce the I&R service as a prominent option.

5.6 - When the I&R service offers an online resource database, consideration is given to characteristics that promote **human-centered design**, including:

- available at no cost.
- easy to navigate.
- **mobile-friendly**.
- visual-guided search options.
- natural language search options.
- multiple search methods which may include:
    - organization/agency and/or program/service names (or AKA names)
    - resource classification/taxonomy terms and/or keywords
    - geographic location
- **filters** for search results include data elements that enable individuals to make informed decisions (e.g., hours, eligibility, location, and proximity mapping).

5.7 - The I&R service makes supplemental information available on its website for special populations or topics.

5.8 - Based on local needs, the I&R service compiles and distributes directories of services in print or electronic format and has a process to regularly update the information to ensure accuracy.

5.9 - Quality assurance processes are in place to ensure that these methods of access are providing accurate/verifiable information.

5.10 - The principles of confidentiality remain applicable in cases involving independent service delivery methods. In situations where online information can be gathered, information about individual activities is only made available in aggregate form.

5.11 - The principles of accessibility remain applicable in cases involving independent service delivery to meet the communication needs and preferences of individuals.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

5.12 - Quality reviews are performed on a regular basis to assess that accurate and verifiable information is provided.

5.13 - The I&R service engages different demographic groups in the community to determine how they access information. Where appropriate, a technology plan is created to address concerns in how community groups access the I&R service's tools and information.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

5.14 - Staff actively share information with contacts about how to access independent service delivery methods.

5.15 - Staff will inform the appropriate internal contact (e.g., Database Curator) when/if they become aware that information may need updating.

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

The I&R service generates valuable information about the problems/needs of a community and the availability of resources to meet those needs. The data collected can be analyzed, aggregated, and reported to inform outreach to diverse communities, community needs assessment, community planning, allocation of funding, and **system advocacy**.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

6.1 - The I&R service uses its data for a variety of purposes such as outreach to diverse communities, **community needs assessment**, community planning, allocation of funding, system advocacy, and reporting to funding organizations.

6.2 - The I&R service has procedures that address data collection and analysis, including:

- a defined set of inquirer data elements.
- individuals having the right to withhold information.
- data-sharing guidelines that protect both confidentiality and PII.
- assurance that, when data is reported widely, it is representative of the community (see glossary term: **sample size**).
- stakeholder engagement (e.g. community partners, communities with lived experience) that informs the interpretation and analysis of data.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

6.3 - The I&R service generates service delivery activity reports which may include:

- total number of **contacts** (e.g., calls, texts, chats, emails, video relay, voicemail, face-to-face, physical mail)
    - total number of contacts by geography (zip code, county, state/province) and by demographics (age, gender, race, etc.)
- the number and percentage of inquiries by **contact type** including:
    - Information
    - Referral
    - Advocacy
    - Crisis
- total number and types of problems/needs presented by individuals including both **met** and **unmet needs**.
    - trends in types of contacts' needs including possible **cross tabulations** of types of problems/needs by geographic location and/or geographic location and the problems/needs within them.

6.4 - The I&R service collects qualitative data such as:

- complaints.
- commendations.
- success stories that illustrate situations and resulting outcomes.
- follow-up outcomes.

6.5 - The I&R service collects data regarding independent service delivery methods, including:

- social media posting/interactions.

- website visitor activity (e.g., total visits, unique visitors, individual page visits, searches conducted).
- people accessing recorded information.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

6.6 - When collecting inquirer data, staff follow all data, technology, and privacy protocols. Staff understand that the data collected has an impact on the I&R service's reporting.

SECTION 2: RESOURCE DATABASE

An I&R service is a provider of information to the public, and individuals using the service have a right to accurate, consistent, comprehensive, and unbiased information. Therefore, the I&R service develops, maintains, and publishes a resource database that contains accurate and updated information about available resources. It has staff that are specifically trained in the maintenance of the information (Database Curators). The I&R service makes sure the information is available for internal and public use and is structured in ways that make searching as intuitive and user-friendly as possible. The I&R service also analyzes the resource information to help identify/report about the resource availability or gaps within a community.

Standard 7: Inclusion Criteria

The I&R service develops and publishes criteria for adding, changing, and removing national, territorial, state/provincial, and local government, nonprofit, and relevant for-profit organizations in their internal and external I&R databases. The criteria address the human services needs of all groups in the community served by the I&R service, and are uniformly applied and publicly available so that all users are aware of the scope and limitations of the database.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

7.1 - The I&R service documents its **inclusion criteria** for the contents of the resource database. The criteria address the human service needs of all groups in the community served by the I&R, and the available resources (e.g., government, nonprofit, relevant for-profit organizations, unincorporated groups, disaster services) as well as entities that may not be included.

7.2 - The I&R service makes their inclusion criteria available to the public, under a naming of their choosing.

7.3 - The I&R service does not charge a fee for the inclusion of any organization in its public resource database.

7.4 - The I&R service should make a determination about how long an organization/agency should provide services before it becomes eligible for inclusion.

7.5 - The I&R service criteria strives for balance when including political cause and issue-oriented action groups.

7.6 - The organization's inclusion criteria are reviewed and updated 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).

7.7 - The I&R service has documented procedures for evaluating new organizations considered for inclusion. The process shall include:

- utilization of a consistent form to collect data elements.
- notification to new organizations that the information may be edited for brevity, clarity, and content as well.
- notification to new organizations that the information may be published in a variety of media.
- verification of the organizations' resource record before publishing.
- notification if the organization does not meet the criteria.

7.8 - The inclusion criteria include an appeal process for organizations seeking clarification on either the document itself or the application of the criteria.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

7.9 - The inclusion 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 Inform USA Standards.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

7.10 - Staff follow the inclusion criteria when adding new resources to the database, and a notification process for those who fall outside the criteria.

Standard 8: Data Structure and Data Elements

The I&R service's resource database utilizes a **data structure** that contains records of information about organizations, and the services they provide by location. Each **resource record** contains at least the Inform USA mandatory **data elements** if that information is available.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

8.1 - The I&R service's resource database utilizes a software that supports a data structure of records organized in a hierarchical manner, including organization/agency, location/site, and service/program levels. Each level of the data structure includes the relevant data elements.

- Organization/Agency level data example elements: Name, Street/Physical Address, Website, Name and Title of Organization/Agency Administrator.
- Location/Site level data example elements: Name, Street/Physical Address, Phone Number.
- Service/Program level data example elements: Eligibility, Hours of Operation, Application/Intake Process. ***See Resource Database Appendix** - **Data Structure Chart.**

8.2 - The I&R service's resource database utilizes a software that includes administrative data elements which assist the Database Curator in overseeing the record and may be automatically assigned by the software platform.

- Example administrative data elements include: Unique ID numbers, record ownership, date of last annual verification, record status (active/inactive).
- Some administrative data elements may not be publicly visible but should be visible for Database Curators. ***See Resource Database Appendix** - **Data Structure Chart.**

8.3 - If an I&R service publishes or otherwise makes its resource database accessible to other technology platforms, data elements should match the schema used in the open source **Human Services Database Specification (HSDS).**

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

8.4 - The I&R service has a procedure to ensure that information is consistently included for the appropriate data element, and at the appropriate level within the resource data structure.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

8.5 - Data elements that are pertinent to accurate and appropriate information and/or referral provision are mandatory and include information that is available in the associated data fields.

- If the data element is used within the resource data structure, but not relevant for a particular service, that field should contain either "not applicable" or "none" whenever possible. For example, if the individual needs to provide documentation to apply for a service, that information must be added. If the individual does not need to provide documentation to apply, then the field should state "not applicable" or "none".

Standard 9: Classification/Taxonomy System

The I&R service uses a system to classify, index, and facilitate retrieval of resource information.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

9.1 - The I&R service uses a **classification system** or taxonomy system to organize its resource records.

- Use of the **211HSIS** (formerly referred to as 211 LA County Taxonomy) is recommended for 211 providers, but not required by Inform USA's Standards.
- Any classification/taxonomy system used must meet the following set of minimally acceptable criteria:
  - established terms with uniquely identified codes and documented definitions, along with a changelog including date of last change.
  - documented guidance on best practices for consistent use.
  - the taxonomy is adaptable, updatable, not static (i.e., a living document)
  - there is a responsible body for stewarding the taxonomy, with a documented process for making changes.
  - available in a structured, **machine-readable format**, to enable integration with software.
  - at least one level of subcategories, to establish at least minimally-viable specificity.
  - at a high level, terms must be in documented alignment with the 211HSIS taxonomy (commonly referred to as mapping or crosswalking) OR the taxonomy must be **non-proprietary** (licensed in a way that permits open access without cost, i.e. **LOINC**).

9.2 - The I&R service has procedures in place to update and integrate additions and changes to the classification/taxonomy system on a regular schedule according to their procedures.

9.3 - The I&R service uses software that supports the identified classification/taxonomy system and provides basic functionality.

9.4 - The software incorporates the **Structural Elements/Functionality of a Classification System/Taxonomy**.

9.5 - The I&R service develops procedures to ensure consistent indexing of database records which includes:

- **customization of the classification/taxonomy system.**
- accurate indexing that reflects the type of service provided, population served, and or/issue.
- only index **primary services** that meet the I&R service's inclusion/exclusion criteria and avoid indexing **secondary services**, **ancillary services**, **phantom services**, and **indirect services**.
- avoid using multiple service terms within the classification/taxonomy system ("**double indexing**"), regardless of where they are located in the hierarchy to index a particular service.

9.6 - The I&R service has a process for proposing and communicating changes to the classification/taxonomy system.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

9.7 - The I&R service regularly reviews the indexing of resources to ensure consistency.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

9.8 - Database Curators consistently apply rules for indexing database records. They choose terms that accurately reflect the type of service provided, population served, and or/issue.

Standard 10: Content Management

The I&R service ensures that Database Curators organize information about human services into accurate and concise database records through database management procedures, training, and supervision.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

10.1 - The I&R service maintains data using various methods to aid internal and external users in the search and retrieval of resources such as:

- organization/agency and/or program/service names and related AKAs.
- type of services provided (using classification/taxonomy system service terms including **use references** and **see also references**) with access to definitions.
- **target population** served, where applicable (using classification/taxonomy system target terms) with access to definitions.
- area served.
- geographic area served, proximity to the inquirer's location.
- demographic data.
- language availability.

10.2 - The I&R service has documented **update verification procedures** that ensure the accuracy of each database record which include:

- all updates are reviewed by a Database Curator prior to the content being published. Updated records are retained until a more recent version is received.
- disclosure 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.
- a process for gathering and integrating new and interim information changes (e.g., changes that occur between annual verification).

- a process for expediting resource responses in terms of importance, especially in areas where resources are limited. For example, organizations/services that meet critical needs or the focus of the most referrals received.
- a process for utilizing alternate methods to update information for organizations that do not respond after multiple direct attempts (e.g., calling their staff, visiting the website, site visits).
- a process for ensuring up-to-date information for high-priority organizations who do not respond after multiple direct attempts. If the record cannot be deleted, the Database Curator obtains the best information possible and marks the record as having received its annual review.

10.3 - The I&R service employs an adequate number of staff to properly maintain the resource database, as well as ancillary responsibilities. Factors to consider include:

- number of organization/agency and program/service records being maintained.
- relevance of the inclusion 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).
- the overall complexity of the resource database and/or organizational records and the time needed for updating (e.g., through use of calculating **complexity score** of resources).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

10.4 - The I&R service ensures through training that Database Curators understand the human service delivery system, including the sectors it comprises, as well as the community it serves.

10.5 - The I&R service uses a **style guide** that establishes rules for structuring information in a way that is clear, concise, consistent, relevant and user friendly, including guidance on the following:

- specific requirements for all data elements/data fields in use.
- 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.
- well-written and concise narrative descriptions that support indexing decisions, including: clearly and correctly distinguishing primary services and secondary services, and all services and service conditions that are described are indexed, and vice versa.
- distinguishing the organization/agency's location and programs/services' coverage areas.
- avoidance of repeating phone numbers and/or other data that has its own structured field(s).
- resource entries are proofread to eliminate spelling and grammatical errors.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

10.6 - Database Curators engage in activities aimed at establishing positive, long-term relationships with organizations in their resource database.

10.7 - Database Curators consistently follow the guidelines outlined in the I&R service's style guide.

10.8 - Database Curators consistently follow the procedures for updating resource information.

Standard 11: Resource Database Data Collection, Analysis, and Reporting

The I&R service collects, analyzes, and reports information related to the resource database in ways that are useful to themselves and community partners, including describing the types of services that are available, the organizations that provide them, and the specific areas in which services are available or unavailable.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

11.1 - The I&R service periodically analyzes the contents of its resource database to determine the types of services available within various human services sectors, the number of those services, their locations and areas served, availability, etc. The results are shared with funders and decision makers in an attempt to increase the social service system's ability to meet community needs.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

11.2 - The I&R service produces resource database activity reports that may include:

- total organizational and program records.
- total number of referrals to organizations and programs.
- the number of interim changes made throughout the year.
- the number of new records researched and added to the resource database.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

11.3 - Database Curators contribute to the analysis of the use and contents of the I&R's resource database.

11.4 - Database Curators engage in discussions with Community Resource Specialists, as well as with other human services agencies, regarding demographic and basic needs that are trending in the community.

11.5 - Database Curators incorporate feedback about the data within the database, whether received by staff of their own organization, another organization, or members of the public, and make changes when necessary.

SECTION 3: COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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 12: Cooperative Relationships within the I&R System

In communities that have multiple I&R services, they work together to build a coordinated **I&R system**.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

12.1 - The I&R service participates in ongoing cooperative program planning and development activities including:

- identifying community I&R needs.
- maintaining current information about other I&R services and their activities.
- exploring new cooperative service opportunities.
- working to address system-wide I&R issues.

12.2 - The I&R service coordinates its service delivery with other programs in the area to avoid duplication of effort and improve access to services.

12.3 - When **comprehensive** and **specialized I&R service** areas overlap, they define and document their working relationships in a written form/agreement (for example a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**). The objectives are to ensure that people needing services have access to the most appropriate I&R service.

- Organizations coordinate their efforts with their partners to meet the critical needs of all individuals in the community (e.g., after-hours coverage, linked websites, etc).
- Core elements of the agreement are embedded in the organizational protocols/procedures.
- Relationships are tracked and may be used for goal setting.

12.4 - I&R services communicate with one another regarding promotional, marketing, or other communication efforts to avoid public confusion.

12.5 - The I&R service may participate in resource **database collaboratives** or other data use partnerships (such as **statewide/provincewide databases**) to minimize duplication of effort and achieve broader coverage of different types of community resources.

12.6 - When I&R organizations share inquirer data/information, written agreements are in place to protect PII.

12.7 - When an I&R service shares its resource data, written data-sharing agreements should be in place that include elements that protect the integrity of the resource data (e.g., a time limit on the use of the data, an agreement that data cannot be repurposed without permission, and a description of any updating responsibilities).

12.8 - I&R service providers participate in data collection, analysis, and reporting activities with community partners and other data sources in meaningful ways. I&R services may combine contact data to provide a comprehensive picture of service requests (e.g., mapping with Census data; overlaying requests for particularly critical services and showing the location of organizations that provide those services).

12.9 - The I&R service leverages technology to collaborate with other I&R services and increase access and collaborative ventures. For example, **Application Programming Interfaces (APIs)** and other mechanisms that provide opportunities to move up-to-date resource database information into other systems.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

12.10 - Training is provided to staff to ensure knowledge and value for partnerships and collaborations.

12.11 - Opportunities for cross-training with other community resources are made available.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

12.12 - Community Resource Specialists follow established referral processes among collaborating I&R services.

12.13 - Community Resource Specialists engage in peer-to-peer interactions on behalf of individuals and communities (e.g. community events, resource fairs, community programs).

12.14 - Database Curators collaborate with other I&R providers to develop common curation practices to maximize interoperability (e.g., taxonomy, style guide).

Standard 13: Cooperative Relationships with Service Providers

The I&R service develops cooperative working relationships with human service providers (e.g., food pantries or homeless shelters) and larger service systems (e.g., organizations serving individuals with mental health or substance use disorder issues). These relationships help to advance an integrated service delivery system that ensures broad access to community services.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

13.1 - 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, systems reporting).

13.2 - The I&R service works cooperatively with service providers to address issues that have a critical impact on the community as a whole (e.g., **disaster relief** and **disaster recovery**, homelessness, and **Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)**).

13.3 - 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.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

13.4 - Training and supervision are provided for collaborative service delivery activities (e.g., case coordination, eligibility screening).

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

13.5 - Community Resource Specialists follow established processes (e.g., referral, screening) among service providers.

13.6 - Community Resource Specialists engage in activities that mutually benefit service providers and their recipients (e.g., cross-training, awareness and outreach, knowledge sharing, other activities).

13.7 - Database Curators may share data/create reports to help other service providers understand referrals in their community.

SECTION 4: DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The I&R service is prepared to meet the needs of their community and has plans to provide services before, during, and after a **disaster.** **Please note these disaster-related standards supplement the other sections of the Inform USA Standards.*

Standard 14: Disaster Planning

The I&R service has two written plans to prepare for disasters. One that specifically addresses **disaster preparedness**, which is the **emergency**

operations plan, and another for **business continuity** such as a **Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)**.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

14.1 - The I&R service has an **emergency operation plan** (***See Disaster Preparedness Appendix**). The plan could include:

- continuity of mission-critical functions (including designation of staff roles and responsibilities).
- procedures, including responses to various kinds of emergencies.
- staff training and preparation.
- post-emergency activities.

14.2 - The I&R service has a business continuity plan which has provisions for continued operations for the service (e.g., redirection of calls, remote work, continuing to update community resources, training and onboarding temporary staff). This plan may include written agreements with other I&R services.

14.3 - The I&R service should have a standing **mutual assistance agreement** or other written agreement with at least one I&R service outside the service area for maintaining service delivery before, during, and after an emergency. The agreement and protocols are updated to align with the I&R service's continuity of operations plan and emergency operations plan. The agreement should include:

- protocols for activation.
- cooperative procedures for maintaining service delivery.
- training exercises

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

14.4 - The I&R service provides training on the organization's disaster preparedness and continuity of operations procedures for all staff, and staff know their role within them.

14.5 - Disaster plans are published, exercised, and staff know where they can access them.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

14.6 - Staff are aware of both the emergency operations plan and continuity of operations plan and their role within them.

14.7 - 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 organizations' roles in an emergency.

Standard 15: Relationships with Emergency and Relief Organizations

The I&R service establishes relationships and participates in planning cooperative disaster response within their coverage area's **disaster services** network.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

15.1 - The I&R service understands the emergency management structure within their jurisdiction(s).

15.2 - The I&R service understands their own role and that of other organizations in the response, relief, and recovery phases of a disaster services network. The I&R service participates in community **disaster training exercises**.

15.3 - 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. These agreements outline the roles and responsibilities of all parties.

15.4 - The I&R service actively participates in community meetings that address plans for disaster preparedness, **disaster mitigation**, **disaster response**, relief, and recovery.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

15.5 - Supervisors ensure that staff, as appropriate to their role, obtain national training or certification for incident management for staff (e.g. **National Incident Management System (NIMS)** in the United States or **Incident Command System (ICS)** in Canada).

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

15.6 - Staff obtain national training or certification for incident management through NIMS or ICS.

Standard 16: Disaster-Related I&R Service Delivery

The I&R service provides service delivery functions to the community before, during, and following a disaster or other emergency.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

16.1 - The I&R service ensures it is capable of handling and/or adapting to an increased level of contacts and needs through a disaster. This may include:

- a plan to quickly recruit, train and utilize volunteers or staff who are assigned to provide information and referral and database curation.
- the ability to provide information via other methods of service delivery (e.g., independent access tools such as special webpages, guides, IVR)
- an internal communication plan/tool for messaging staff with updates (e.g., project or resources management tools)
- potential facility issues particularly in situations where additional staff/volunteers may be working for the I&R service (e.g., 24-hour environmental controls, cleanliness and sanitation, parking and security)

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

16.2 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that staff understand the organization's role and mission in times of disaster and the government emergency response service delivery system at all levels.

16.3 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that staff understand the types of needs people typically request before, during, and following a disaster, including:

- general disaster information and assistance
- government or organizational closures
- atypical services people may need to access (e.g., open hardware stores or laundry services, functioning ATM machines)

- damage reporting
- debris removal / disposal locations

16.4 - The I&R service ensures through training that staff understand the structure of disaster resources within the database, approved sources of disaster-related information, and how to communicate necessary changes to Database Curators.

16.5 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring and coaching that Community Resource Specialists have the skills to respond effectively in disasters. This includes:

- understanding and assisting people physically and emotionally impacted by a disaster.
- working cooperatively with other organizations.
- planning for potential changes in modality of service delivery, such as:
    - remaining flexible in a rapidly changing environment
    - inquiries from the media
    - provision of services face-to-face
    - willingness to work under adverse conditions (e.g., long hours, uncomfortable surroundings)
- addressing the specific requirements of people with **access and functional needs.**
- responding to inaccurate information.

16.6 - The I&R service has written procedures and training for staff who are assigned to provide information and referral at local assistance centers or other off-site locations.

16.7 - 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.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

16.8 - Staff perform service delivery in accordance with disaster procedures in all modalities (e.g., off-site).

16.9 - Staff communicate necessary changes to resource information to Database Curators.

Standard 17: Disaster Resources

The I&R service curates information about community resources available in times of disaster.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

17.1 - The I&R service's resource database includes information about permanent local, state/provincial, territorial and federal disaster-related resources (e.g., organizations with a formal role in emergency response, a clearly defined disaster mission, and/or a history of providing services during previous incidents).

17.2 - The I&R service researches and verifies information about organizations and services that emerge in the context of a particular disaster.

17.3 - The I&R service has an **escalation process** for reviewing and vetting disaster-related information.

17.4 - The I&R service disseminates or provides access to disaster-related resource information in accordance with the communities needs (e.g., resource directories, lists, guides, website, social media, etc.).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

17.5 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that Database Curators understand the types of disasters and related resources, as well as how to:

- collect, validate, and maintain disaster-related information.
- index disaster resources.
- ensure consistent style with rapidly changing information.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

17.6 - Database Curators follow the escalation process for reviewing and vetting disaster-related information throughout the preparedness, response, relief, and recovery phases.

17.7 - Database Curators communicate new and updated information to I&R service staff.

Standard 18: Disaster-Related Data Collection/Reports

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

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

18.1 - The I&R service has a standardized process to effectively document inquirer data to support service delivery throughout the stages of a disaster.

18.2 - The I&R service analyzes data and produces timely reports for the community and stakeholders that could include:

- volume of disaster inquiries.
- demographic data and demographic profiles.
- total volume of referrals.
- service requests for specific programs and organizations.
- met and unmet needs.
- trends in community service provision.

18.3 - The I&R service has a process for producing an **after-action report** that helps improve future disaster planning and staff training.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

18.4 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that staff are familiar with disaster-related documentation.

18.5 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that disaster-related contacts and resource data are reviewed and corrected according to its quality assurance process.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

18.6 - Staff will collect and document disaster-related contact and resource data in accordance with organizational procedures, and corrections are made when necessary.

Standard 19: Disaster-Related Technology

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

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

19.1 - The I&R service has established relationships with their key technology vendors for continued service in times of disaster.

19.2 - The I&R service regularly identifies risks and solutions for technology, technical connections, and other resources that may be impacted during emergency conditions.

19.3 - The I&R service has and exercises solutions for emergency power sources such as **emergency generators**, and **Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS).**

19.4 - The I&R service has and exercises the technology tools in its disaster plan to ensure the technical ability to continue services (e.g., remote work, redirecting services to alternate locations).

19.5 - The I&R service has and exercises an alternate method for documenting contacts in the event that the I&R service software is unavailable (e.g., paper or online forms).

19.6 - The I&R service has and exercises an alternate method for accessing resource information in the event that the resource database is unavailable (e.g., cloud-based access, shared database platform, a downloaded copy of the database or server, or a printed directory).

19.7 - The I&R service has and exercises technology tools that facilitate channels for internal communication between staff and management.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

19.8 - Supervision, training, and coaching are provided so that staff are prepared to use the alternative technology methods to continue service delivery documentation and access to resource information.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

19.9 - Staff alert management when technology solutions are not operating as intended during disasters and emergencies.

19.10 - Staff adhere to alternate methods for documenting contacts if the I&R service software is unavailable.

19.11 - Staff adhere to alternate methods for accessing resource information if the resource database is unavailable.

SECTION 5: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The organization's **governance** and operational structure enables the I&R service to fulfill its mission. Organizational effectiveness activities include: developing **policies** and **procedures** and a **code of ethics** that guide the I&R service; 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; developing and implementing an ongoing quality assurance and evaluation process.

Standard 20: Governance and Oversight

The I&R service has a governance and operational structure that enables the I&R service to fulfill its mission.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

20.1 - 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.

20.2 - The I&R service has a mission statement that is reflective of the organization's purpose.

20.3 - The I&R service engages in strategic planning 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.

20.4 - The organization and/or I&R service has and regularly reviews policies and procedures that reflect its core operational principles (e.g., board/organizational governance, employee policies, protections for whistleblowers, fiscal regulations, data security, **risk management** procedures, hiring and training practices). These are available to all staff.

20.5 - The I&R service participates in **public policy** or educational 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.

20.6 - The I&R service has a formal process for registering and attempting to resolve complaints from individuals, staff members, and the community. All complaints can be appealed to the governing body as a final step in the process.

20.7 - 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 as well as any potential areas of conflicts of interest with colleagues, managers, the communities they serve, and other human service professionals. This is included in the employee handbook or equivalent.

20.8 - The organization and/or I&R service has a diversity statement that prohibits **discrimination** and includes equity, access, and inclusion principles.

20.9 - The organization and/or I&R service has sound **fiscal controls** to manage revenue and expenses. All financial controls and procedures are consistent with generally accepted accounting principles and in compliance with legal requirements.

20.10 - The organization and/or I&R service has insurance coverage including but may not be limited to; cyber insurance (to protect against possible data breaches), personal and property liability, and **indemnification** for board members, staff, and volunteers.

20.11 - Regardless of the location where services are provided, the I&R service maintains standards of confidentiality and support for staff. This ensures consistency and a high level of professionalism in service delivery.

20.12 - The organization and/or I&R service has a **document/data retention and destruction policy** that follows legal, contractual, or organizational requirements (e.g., fiscal documents, program data, personnel records).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

20.13 - The I&R service ensures through training and coaching that staff understand the code of ethics, conflict of interest and diversity statements of the program, and how their work contributes to the broader strategic goals of the organization.

Standard 21: Technology

The I&R service has a **technology** infrastructure (e.g., telephonic systems, computer systems, software programs, websites) that support the ability of staff to meet operational goals, improve access, accommodate the communications preferences of individuals, remove barriers to information, and overall assure a quality experience.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

21.1 - The organization and/or I&R service has a strategy to maintain its Information Technology (IT) infrastructure (e.g., access to IT professionals; software updates; a priority response during breakdowns).

21.2 - The organization and/or I&R service evaluates and tests new methods of access and technical advances prior to implementation to ensure that service delivery or resource database services are enhanced, and the privacy and confidentiality of individuals are protected (e.g. **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** enhanced products, electronic referrals, data exchange, **Community Information Exchange (CIE)** aspects).

21.3 - The organization and/or I&R service regularly conducts technology redundancy exercises and documents the results. The exercises highlight vulnerabilities in data back-up and system restoration protocols for all main technology systems.

21.4 - The I&R service evaluates how different demographic groups in the community access information and creates technology goals for the organization that reflect changing inquirer needs and preferences.

21.5 - The organization and/or I&R service has policies and procedures related to information technology, **cybersecurity** (e.g., threats to inquirer privacy; safeguarding critical contact and resource data; sharing, retention and disposal of data; securing physical IT assets) and **cyberethics** (e.g., engaging in responsible online behavior).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

21.6 - The I&R service provides training for staff regarding information technology, cybersecurity and cyber ethics policies and procedures.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

21.7 - I&R staff understand and follow cybersecurity and ethics policies and procedures in all work settings.

Standard 22: 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 for the work environment (e.g., in-person, hybrid, remote).

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

22.1 - The I&R service has an organizational chart that shows levels of authority and the reporting relationships within the organization. If the service is part of a larger organization, the I&R service is included within the chart.

22.2 - 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 and includes strategies for developing current staff and/or hiring individuals with the skills to meet future needs.

22.3 - The I&R service has job descriptions for all employees and volunteers that outline duties, responsibilities, essential job functions, and supervisory relationships.

22.4 - The I&R service has a hiring plan that:

- disseminates job and volunteer postings broadly to help ensure applicants reflect the community.
- uses a standardized screening process to compare each candidate's qualifications and experience to the job description.
- uses structured interview questions that are specific to the position and the values of the organization.
- has an objective process for interviewing and evaluating candidates, based on skills, knowledge, and aptitude related to the position.

22.5 - The organization and/or I&R service has a policy and/or procedure for reasonable employee accommodations.

22.6 - The I&R service provides tools and technology to support the ability of staff and volunteers to work remotely with the same capabilities as on-site staff.

22.7 - The I&R service has communication tools to facilitate information sharing between and among staff (e.g., regular staff meetings, internal chat software, project management software, in-person dialogue, collaborative problem solving).

22.8 - The I&R service conducts a workplace **ergonomic** review periodically to identify and mitigate risk factors for all workplace settings (home or office). The evaluation considers work activities, repetitive movement patterns, workstation design, workplace seating, work tools and equipment.

22.9 - The I&R service works collaboratively with staff to develop healthy workplace initiatives that give education and support (e.g., stress reduction; strategies for burn-out/compassion fatigue; healthy relationships).

22.10 - The I&R service provides training, tools, and resources for supervisors to ensure effective personnel management. Tools such as internal or independent **call monitoring** processes or **schedule adherence** may be utilized.

22.11 - The I&R service conducts regular performance reviews across work settings using standard performance appraisal tools that align with the employee's job description.

22.12 - Individual improvement plans are used if performance issues are identified. If the improvements outlined in the plan are not met, the I&R service has a procedure for progressive remediation.

22.13 - The I&R service monitors employee turnover/attrition and reasons for leaving and has a process for identifying when the turnover begins to impact service delivery and quality (e.g., exit surveys or interviews; confidential staff surveys).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

22.14 - The I&R service uses established coaching and training methods for effective monitoring and development of staff.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

22.15 - In **remote work** settings, staff ensure an environment that supports the privacy and confidentiality of information.

Standard 23: 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 Inform USA I&R Training Manual, the Inform USA Standards, and the Job Task Analyses for Community Resource Specialists and Database Curators.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

23.1 - The I&R service's new hire and ongoing professional development training is consistent with the material contained in the Inform USA I&R Training Manual.

23.2 - Training encompasses the tasks, knowledge, and skills outlined in the Inform USA Job Task Analyses for Community Resource Specialists (CRS), Community Resource Specialists – Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D), and Community Resource Specialists – Database Curators (CRS-DC).

23.3 - The I&R service accommodates the diverse **learning styles** of staff and volunteers.

23.4 - The I&R service's training program accommodates both in-person and remote learning, and provides methods for evaluating learning progress.

23.5 - The I&R service provides new hire orientation and onboarding for new staff and volunteers that could include topics such as:

- 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).

23.6 - Following orientation, a 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.

- performing **staff evaluations** using objective tools (e.g., written tests, quality monitoring forms, qualitative measures, observation) to ascertain whether trainees have developed sufficient **competency** before assuming additional duties.

23.7 - The I&R service provides ongoing professional development, including 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.

23.8 - The I&R service evaluates the effectiveness of its training program and training providers, and modifies the training based on feedback and evaluation.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

23.9 - Certification and recertification are included in the ongoing professional development plans for all staff and volunteers. Community Resource Specialists, Database Curators, and other staff seek to obtain professional credentials such as Inform USA Certification through organizationally recognized state, provincial, territorial or national programs.

Standard 24: 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.

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

24.1 - To ensure the I&R service is achieving its mission, it uses data analysis and community feedback to inform its outreach plan and activities. Plans should include a variety of methods and strategies (e.g., in-person and digital).

24.2 - The I&R service establishes measurable outreach objectives (e.g., to increase the number of inquiries from a particular community by 5% over the next year) and develops a process for tracking effectiveness (e.g., examining demographic and referral data).

24.3 - If the I&R service is part of a larger organization, or has staff working in other departments, outreach plans, and objectives are coordinated.

24.4 - The I&R service adapts its communication to reach 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.

24.5 - The I&R service has a plan to develop and strengthen public relations through regular communications with stakeholders (e.g., community service providers, government officials, and local planning bodies) and/or by participating in various community activities (e.g., community resource fairs, cross-sectoral collaborations, community planning meetings).

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

24.6 -The I&R service tracks outreach activities including:

- materials distributed.
- presentations made and participants reached.

- community resource fairs/events and participants reached.

Standard 25: Quality Assurance

The I&R service has quality assurance processes that assess the effectiveness of its service delivery, resource database, and community impact (articulated in organizational quality indicators subheadings below). The I&R service uses quality measures and performance metrics to evaluate operational effectiveness, enhance decision making, improve accountability, set meaningful goals, and strategic objectives and articulate outcomes in key areas of its operation. **Please note - definitions and examples of benchmarks of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are located in the **Organizational Effectiveness Appendix.***

Quality Indicators

Organizational Quality Indicators (Policies/Procedures)

SERVICE DELIVERY

25.1 - The I&R service has designed and implemented a quality assurance process for service delivery, to assess the effectiveness of workforce management, contact quality, and data documentation.

25.2 - The I&R service identifies, defines and uses quality measures and performance metrics (AKA **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**) to evaluate its service delivery. This data can be aggregated and averaged on a regular basis. These metrics may include:

- **contact volume** including:
    - **inbound contacts**
    - **outbound contacts**
    - **transactional contacts**
    - **non-transactional contacts**
    - **hang-ups**

- **abandoned contacts**
- **average abandonment rate**
- **average abandonment time**
- **occupancy rate**
- **average speed of answer**
- **service level**
- **incoming contact patterns**

25.3 - The I&R service identifies, defines, and uses quality measures and performance metrics (KPIs) for their Community Resource Specialists which may be reviewed for individual staff performance as well as aggregated and averaged for the service as a whole. These metrics may include:

- **average handle time**
- **contact quality**
- **customer satisfaction with service delivery**
- **data/documentation accuracy**
- **data/documentation completeness**

RESOURCE DATABASE

25.4 - The I&R service has designed and implemented a quality assurance process for the resource database, which includes:

- ensuring database records consistently adhere to the style guide.
- making adequate attempts to verify the information (e.g., phone calls, website visits, site visits).
- reviewing the classification system/taxonomy terms to evaluate **indexing** consistency across **organizational records** and adherence to Inform USA Resource Database Standards.

25.5 - The I&R service identifies, defines, and uses quality measures and performance metrics (KPIs) to evaluate its resource database. This data can be aggregated and averaged on a regular basis. These metrics may include:

- **annual verification percentage**
- **attempts to verify resource information**
- **customer satisfaction survey with resource database**
- **number of interim updates**
- **number of new agencies/programs**
- **total organizational and program records**

25.6 - The I&R service identifies, defines, and uses quality measures and performance metrics (KPIs) for their Database Curators, which may be reviewed for individual staff performance as well as aggregated and averaged for the database as a whole. These metrics may include:

- **Database Curator responsiveness**
- **quality of resource database record audits**

COMMUNITY IMPACT

25.7 - 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 individuals to organizations that provide the services they need (AKA **Program Evaluation**).

25.8 - Outcomes information is obtained via direct follow-up with individuals, data partnerships, electronic surveys**,** case studies and impact stories and other measures. Examples of **outcome measures** may include:

- Met or unmet needs: % of individuals whose needs were partially or fully met.
- Improvement/impact rates: % of people whose situation has improved as a result of their interaction with the I&R service.

- **Contact narrative**: Case studies and impact stories that qualitatively describe an individual's situation and contact experience.

25.9 - The I&R service involves community agencies, stakeholders, and/or the general public in their quality assurance process and uses the feedback received to make improvements and program modifications. Methods may include:

- online forms or surveys.
- **focus groups**.
- community meetings.
- third party research and reports.

25.10 - 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.

Oversight Quality Indicators (Supervision/Coaching/Training)

SERVICE DELIVERY

25.11 - The I&R service monitors KPIs for contact management to assess progress on goals (e.g., staffing levels, schedule adherence).

25.12 - The I&R service monitors KPIs for Community Resource Specialists' performance levels to assess progress on goals (e.g., secret shopper, call monitoring).

25.13 - 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.

RESOURCE DATABASE

25.14 - The I&R service monitors KPI's for its resource database to assess progress on goals (e.g., report of % of database updated, report with date of last update).

25.15 - The I&R service monitors KPIs for Database Curators' performance levels to assess progress on goals (e.g., audit resource database records for quality and accuracy).

COMMUNITY IMPACT

25.16 - The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that inquirer and resource data is reviewed and corrected to meet the organization's internal established quality benchmarks.

Practice Quality Indicators (Staff/Volunteer Expectations)

25.17 - Community Resource Specialists provide feedback to Database Curators relating to the accuracy of resource database records for verification and correction.

25.18 - Database Curators incorporate feedback about the data within the database, whether received by staff of their own organization, another organization, or members of the public and make changes when necessary.

25.19 - Database Curators communicate important resource record changes to the Community Resource Specialists.

25.20 - Database Curators track the response rate and methods used to verify information (e.g., calling their staff, visiting the website, site visits).

Standards Appendix

Section 1: Service Delivery Appendix

- **Sample Size Chart** (i.e. follow-ups and customer satisfaction)

Call Center Annual Call Volume	Required *completed* samples with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.	Required *completed* 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

Section 2: Resource Database Appendix

DATA ELEMENTS CHARTS

The following charts depict an example of data elements within a data structure:

- "Mandatory" means that information must be documented if that information is available. When appropriate the field could be populated with a consistent generic response such as "not applicable" or "none."
- "Recommended" means it is advised for thoroughness to enter information in the data element, but would not hinder I&R service provision.
- A designation of "X" stands for "non-applicable." The data element is not necessary at the particular level of the resource data structure.

Database Record Data Elements (Resource Database Data Structure):
The chart below lists the data elements for the **Organization/Agency**, **Location/Site**, and Service/Program levels of an organizational record:

Data Element	***Resource Data Structure***		
	Organization/ Agency Level	***Location/ Site Level***	***Service/ Program Level***
Name	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
AKA (Also Known As) Names	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Legal Status	Mandatory	x	x
Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN/FEIN)	Recommended	x	x
Licenses or Accreditation	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended
Address(es) *This data element applies to services provided at physical, confidential, and virtual locations	Recommended	Mandatory	x
Mailing Address(es) *This data element applies to services provided at physical, confidential, and virtual locations	Recommended	Mandatory	x
Phone Number(s) and Types	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Website URL(s) including Social Media	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended

Email Address(es):	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
Name and Title of Director/Manager	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
Description	Mandatory	Recommended	Mandatory
Days/Hours of Operation	Mandatory	Recommended	Mandatory
Physical /Programmatic Access for People with Disabilities	x	Recommended	Recommended
Eligibility	x	x	Mandatory
Geographic Area Served	x	x	Mandatory
Languages Consistently Available	x	x	Recommended
Documents Required	x	x	Mandatory
Application/Intake Process	x	x	Mandatory
Fees/Payment Options	x	x	Mandatory
Classification System/Taxonomy Term(s) for Services/Targets	Recommended	Recommended	Mandatory

Administration Data Elements (Resource Database Data Structure):
The chart below lists data elements that relate to the database record itself

and are purely administrative in nature. Most are automatically assigned by the system and may not display when records are published but are used by Database Curators.

Data Elements	***Resource Data Structure***		
	Organization/ Agency Level	***Location/ Site Level***	***Service/ Program Level***
Unique ID Number	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Record Ownership Code	Mandatory	X	X
Date of Last Annual Verification	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
Date of Last Interim Change	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
Contact for Last Change	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended
Resource Database Curator for Last Change	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended
Record Status (Active/Inactive):	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Record Inclusion (e.g. displayed online, in specific portals, directories, etc.)	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended

Classification System/Taxonomy - Structural Elements / Functionality

The following charts depicts structural elements and functionality to be considered in a classification/taxonomy system:

- "Required" means that element must be included in the classification/taxonomy system.
- "Recommended" means it is an advised element and or functionality for a classification/taxonomy system.
- "Optional" means that the item could be included, but is not required.

Classification/Taxonomy System <u>Structural Elements</u>		***Recommended Use***		
		Software Requirement	***Use by Database Curators***	***Use by Community Resource Specialists***
Taxonomy Term Name	Required	Required	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term Code	Required	Required	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Definition	Required	Required	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term Date Changed	Required	Recommended	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Use Reference	Optional	Recommended	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term See Also Reference	Optional	Recommended	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term External Classification Terms	Optional	Recommended	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Related Concepts (including codes)	Optional	Recommended	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Facet (service, target, organization/facility, modality/delivery format, etc.)	Optional	Recommended	Yes	No

Classification/Taxonomy System <u>Functionality</u>		***Software Requirement***	***Use by Database Curators***	***Use by Community Resource Specialists***
Taxonomy term (and use references when available) name search (including partial word)	Required	Mandatory	Yes	No
Hierarchical taxonomy term search	Required	Mandatory	Yes	No
Ability to link/append taxonomy target terms	Optional	Mandatory	Yes	No
Ability to export, print and report with various options	Recommended	Mandatory	Yes	No
Specific designation of taxonomy system permission/rights	Recommended	Mandatory	Yes	No
Taxonomy system change management process (incorporate System updates)	Required	Mandatory	Yes	No
Designation of customized taxonomy system (approved/used/ deactivated)	Required	Mandatory	Yes	Yes, except deactivated terms are not visible
Custom categorization of taxonomy terms	Recommended	Recommended	Yes	Yes

Section 4: Disaster Preparedness Appendix

Emergency Operation Plan: The I&R service has written procedures related to four areas of functioning:

Part 1: 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.

Part 2: Expected responses 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, including:
  - plans for assisting staff and visitors with a disability leave the building.
- Gas, electricity, and water shut-off instructions.
- Deploying staff to remote or off-site work locations as needed.

Part 3: Staff training and preparation including:

- Equipment needed for staff and volunteers to maintain service delivery (e.g., go-kits/bags for remote or alternate locations).
- Periodic drills, held annually, at a minimum, that allow staff and volunteers to practice emergency procedures.

Part 4: Post-emergency activities including:
- Damage assessment for the main organizational facility.
- Debriefing staff/volunteers.
- Addressing mental health fatigue and burn-out.
- Documenting emergency plan challenges and how to improve them going forward in an after-action report.
- Reporting the volume of inquirer requests, and the met and unmet needs to emergency planners and the community.

Section 5: Organizational Effectiveness Appendix

KPIs for Service Delivery Management: Data should be aggregated on a regular basis including:

- **Contact Volume:**
  - **Inbound contact volume:**
    - A sum total of calls, emails, chats, texts, in person, emails and physical mail
  - **Outbound contact volume:**
    - Advocacy contacts
    - Follow-up contacts
    - Customer satisfaction/quality assurance contacts
  - **Transactional contacts:** Characterized by direct contact between the Community Resource Specialist and a person concerning a problem/need that involves an I&R activity (information, referral, advocacy, crisis) and one or more of the stages of the I&R process are completed (e.g. Opening, Assessment, Clarification, Information and/or Referral Provision, Closure).
  - **Non-transactional contacts:** Incoming contacts answered/responded to by the Specialist that do not involve an I&R activity (e.g., hang-ups, disconnects, wrong

numbers, administrative, personal in nature or other similar situations).
    - **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.
- **Abandoned contacts:** Incoming calls, chats, texts, emails, etc. that are terminated by the individual while in **queue**, and before it is answered by a Community Resource Specialist.
- **Average abandonment rate:** The percentage of offered calls that are terminated by individuals 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 threshold of 20 or 30 seconds to filter out incomplete calls.
- **Average abandonment time:** The average time that contacts wait in queue before abandoning.
- **Average Speed of Answer (ASA):** The average time it takes an I&R service to answer a contact once it has been placed in queue.
- **Contact pattern (Inbound):** For example, increases or decreases in volume over a certain time frame. What activities (e.g., new outreach, disasters affecting the local community) impact changes in volume? Do staffing schedules reflect contact patterns? What are the patterns among different channels (e.g., text, chat, telephone contacts)?
    - Average service times (Average Speed of Answer, Average Hold Time, Service Level, etc).
    - Unmet demand (such as abandoned contacts/chat/texts)

    - Total number of transactional and non-transactional contacts (i.e. hang-ups).
- **Occupancy rate:** 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 (e.g., 65% - 85%).
- **Problem/needs report:** Includes the total number and types of problems/needs presented by individuals including both **met** and **unmet needs**. This data can be used to track:
    - trends in types of contacts' needs
    - create **cross tabulations** of types of problems/needs by geographic location, and/or geographic location and the problems/needs within them
- **Service level:** Service level goals are often expressed in an abbreviated form (e.g., 80/45 would mean 80% of calls are answered within 45 seconds or less). Centers then compare their service level against their goal. For example, "Our service level last month was 90% of calls being answered within 45 seconds, in comparison to our goal of 80% being answered in 45 seconds". There is no established standard for commercial or government call centers; it all depends on the nature of their business.
- **Schedule adherence:** The percentage of time Community Resource Specialists follow their assigned work schedules (for example, 80% or higher). Work schedules specify the times Specialists are expected to be providing services versus engaging in other identified activities such as taking breaks, going to lunch, attending meetings, or participating in training/coaching sessions.
- **Wrap time:** A documentation activity that occurs after a contact ends with the individual to fully record the contact in the I&R software.

KPIs for Service Delivery Staff (Community Resource Specialists): data may be reviewed for individual staff performance as well as aggregated and averaged for the service as a whole. These indicators may include:

- **Average Handle Time (AHT)**: a measurement of how long a contact takes from beginning to end. Depending on the contact management center software, average hold time, **Average Talk Time (ATT)** and average **wrap time** may be included in this metric. It should be noted that AHT can be measured for all types of contacts, not only phone calls. Each center should define the metric for each type of contact that works best for them.
  - For example, a center could have an ATT of around 7-9 minutes with an 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.
- **Contact quality** (AKA Call Quality): An assessment of the quality of calls (live and/or recorded), monitored by a quality assurance staff. The assessment includes both technical skills (e.g., standard greetings, confidentiality respected, documentation completed) and soft skills (e.g., establishing rapport, friendly tone, active listening, affirmative statements, empathy) demonstrated by the Specialist. The assignment includes both positive behaviors as well as those in need of improvement. 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. For example, 85%-100%.

- **Customer satisfaction survey with service delivery:** A survey process generally conducted immediately following a call, using either an automated instant survey or on a later QA follow-up call (a secondary touch), generally made by a different Specialist and covering only the most critical metrics an I&R service needs to determine satisfaction. Questions focus on the performance of the Community Resource Specialist on the initial contact. Results are used to improve the organization's service delivery. For example, 85-100%. Some examples include:
    - "Was the person friendly?"
    - "Was the staff person you spoke with, professional?"
    - "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?"
    - "Would you contact us again?"
- **Data/documentation accuracy:** A score that indicates the integrity of the data recorded as compared to the content of the contact. For example, 85-100%.
- **Data/documentation completeness:** A score that indicates how thoroughly the Community Resource Specialists document their contacts with individuals. The I&R service has data collection requirements for contacts and compares the data collected against the requirement.

<u>KPIs for Resource Database Management:</u>
Data should be aggregated and averaged on a regular basis. Quality indicators may include:

- **Annual verification percentage:** the number of updated records divided by the total number of records in a database (e.g., 95%

verification rate within a 12-month cycle). This can be reported on a YTD basis or a calendar year, or both.

- **Attempts to verify resource information:** number and type of attempts (e.g., calls, emails, mail, social media)
- **Customer satisfaction survey with resource database:** 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?
- **Number of interim updates:** The I&R service tracks and can report on the number of interim changes made each year in between the annual verifications.
- **Number of new organizations/agencies and programs/services:** includes attempted and completed.
- **Total organizations/agencies and programs/service records:** includes all records, both active and inactive.

KPIs for Resource Database Staff (Database Curators):

- **Database Curator responsiveness:** the average time for Database Curators to process/implement verified changes. When developing this goal, the I&R service factors in resource database complexity and staffing levels. For example, 2-4 working days.
- **Quality of resource database record audits:** internal quality audit of random resource updates completed by Database Curators (for example 85%-100%) which includes an assessment of:
  - The number/percentage of records that meet inclusion 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.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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*: there is a gathering of terms under 'Key Performance Indicators' in the ***Organizational Effectiveness Appendix.*

Abandoned Contacts: Incoming contacts that are terminated by the individual while in queue, and before the Community Resource Specialist answers.

Access and Functional Needs: Specific needs/requirements of people with disabilities and/or health conditions, language barriers, or other applicable characteristics.

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 or activities by individuals with a wide variety of abilities.

Advisory Committee: A formally constituted group of stakeholders that provide information about community needs and issues, recommendations regarding program planning and development activities to ensure that the organization maintains effective connections with the people it serves.

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

Agency: A business or organization established to provide a particular service and where it is licensed for business. An agency may or may not deliver direct services from this location. An agency can be incorporated, unincorporated, or a division of government, and is where the administrative functions typically occur.

Ancillary Services: Organization/agency activities that are not core services and are not worth spending the time and effort to index (e.g., a newsletter).

Application Programming Interfaces (API): A software intermediary that allows two applications to share data with each other. Within I&R, it generally refers to how two software platforms are connected, allowing a user to search in one system, and pull up/link to a record within a different software.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): A machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments. This technology may be used by I&R programs to offer enhanced products for service delivery and database curation and content.

Assessment: Involves evaluating an individual's needs and determining potential eligibility in order to match them with the best support(s).

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.

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

Business Continuity Plan: Involves defining any and all risks that can affect an organization's operations and identifying how it will respond to events that significantly disrupt business and address safeguarding employees and property. This differs from an **emergency operations plan** which defines how an organization operates *during* an emergency.

Call Monitoring: The process of listening to the calls of a Community Resource Specialist to ensure quality services are being delivered. Typically, it involves an experienced supervisor/mentor listening to both sides of the call and providing detailed feedback and support.

Call Recordings: The process of recording calls (could be all calls or a random sampling of calls handled by each Specialist at different times of the day and week) for the purposes of monitoring of a Specialist;s performance. The recordings may be subject to deletion according to prescribed organizational timelines.

Certified Community Resource Specialist (CRS): Designed for practitioners who work directly with clients, whether on the phone or in person and provide mediated information and referral.

Certified Community Resource Specialist - Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D): Designed for practitioners who work directly with clients and caregivers within the aging and/or disabilities area and perform the same basic range of skills and tasks as a comprehensive information and referral Specialist(s).

Certified Resource Specialist – Database Curators (CRS-DC): Designed for practitioners who maintain databases of resources for the communities they serve.

Challenging Interactions: This describes individuals 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 individuals can be extremely manipulative and make multiple calls within a short period of time.

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.

Chatbot: Communicating with an application designed to mimic natural language. It can provide information or referrals from a resource database.

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.

Classification/Taxonomy System Customization: The act of choosing which taxonomy terms should remain active for indexing and searching purposes that mirror the services and needs within the organization's coverage area. These customizations/authorizations of terms are made without changing the basic structure of the classification system/taxonomy or the related service definitions. By deactivating these terms, it makes them unusable to Database Curators doing data entry, and invisible to the Community Resource Specialists while searching, and other end users.

Client Advocacy: Interceding on behalf of an individual and/or groups, with their permission, to ensure that they receive the benefits and services for which they may be eligible. Organizations should have guidelines regarding which circumstances and when Community Resource Specialists could advocate. Client 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).

Coaching: A method for teaching and engaging learning that can be done by peers or others in the work environment. It involves providing ongoing and specific feedback in a supportive manner for employee learning, development, and improvement.

Code of Ethics: Documented professional values and 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.

Community Information Exchange (CIE): An ecosystem comprised of multidisciplinary network partners that use a shared language, a resource database, and an integrated technology platform to deliver enhanced community care planning.

Community Needs Assessment: Uses a research-based approach to provide community leaders with a snapshot of local policies, systems, and the environmental scan of programs in place to identify areas for improvement.

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

Complexity Score: A weighted system applied to resources to help project the amount of time needed for updating. Resources with high complexity, have multiple locations, services, etc. Resources with lower complexity, would perhaps have one site and one service.

Comprehensive I&R Services: 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 individuals, their requests, and the resources given to them, except under specified circumstances. Information about an individual 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.

Contact Type: The nature of the service that Community Resource Specialists provide for individuals including:

- Information
- Referral
- Advocacy
- Crisis

Contacts (noun): Inquiries which could include incoming contacts (initiated by individuals) and outgoing contacts (initiated by Community Resource

Specialists), emails, texts, chats, emails, online form submissions, etc.

Contact (verb): 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.

Contact Narrative: A description of the contact that qualitatively describes an individual's situation and contact experience.

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP): 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.

Credentialing: A broad 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 may include but not be limited to: 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; or people in crisis with substance use disorders.

Crisis Hotline Service: Offers access to trained crisis specialists who can help people experiencing suicidal, substance use, and/or mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress.

Crisis Intervention: A service that provides immediate assistance to persons who may be experiencing a crisis. The objective of crisis intervention is to identify and defuse the critical nature of the situation, ensure the person's safety, and assist the person in identifying and seeking solutions to the problem.

Cross Tabulations: A way of representing data that shows linkages between data points, for example types of problems/needs by geographic location, and/or geographic location and the problems/needs within them.

Cultural Competency: An awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, behaviors, beliefs, and biases that bring an ability to interact with and understand people from other cultures without imposing one's own cultural values.

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 (religion, political affiliation, gender identity, nationality, physical disability, socio-economic status, age, racial background, education, disability, etc). The individual strives to effectively operate in different cultural contexts.

Cyberethics: Basic ethics and etiquette that encompass good user behavior that must be followed while using a computer system.

Cybersecurity: Protecting networks, devices, and data from unauthorized access or criminal use and ensuring confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information.

Data Collection: The systematic process of recording and organizing essential information about individuals, their needs, the referral(s) made on their behalf and follow-up results, when available. This also includes collection and maintenance of information about community services in the resource database, their programs, locations, and other pertinent information needed to make appropriate referrals.

Data Elements: Distinguishable, defined units of information that are contained within a resource database. A Data Field, by contrast, refers to the specific place ("container") in which that information is stored. The Inform USA 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. **Please note - definitions for individual data elements are listed in the I&R Training Manual.*

Data Structure: The data elements and the organization of the resource records form the data structure of an I&R service resource database. Specific data elements that are seen by a particular group of users (e.g., Database Curators, Community Resource Specialists, the general public) may vary. Note that "data elements" are not intended to be equivalent to "data fields" within the context of software structure. Multiple data elements may be handled within a single data field depending on the design of the software.

Database Collaborative: A group of I&R services that agree to share responsibility for maintaining information about 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 Mitigation: Activities done to prevent or minimize property damage or destruction, personal injury, and/or loss of life when a disaster actually occurs. Mitigation seeks to fix the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.

Disaster Preparedness: A continuous cycle of planning prior to an emergency that supports community readiness. It includes organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action in an effort to ensure effective coordination during a disaster.

Disaster Recovery: Longer-term assistance for people who have suffered injuries or incurred losses due to a disaster.

Disaster Relief: Services that facilitate the exchange of information and/or provide short-term assistance 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 event 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, mass shooting, 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.

Disaster Training Exercise: A simulated emergency in which staff of various organizations perform the tasks that would be expected of them in an emergency.

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: Being mindful of the breadth and depth of human differences. Diversity recognizes and respects these differences and strives to celebrate them.

Document/Data Retention and Destruction Policy: Written principles that guide how data is captured, stored, or removed.

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

Electronic Forms: Online forms which can be used to collect or share information between individuals and an I&R service.

Emergency Generators: Designed to kick in automatically in order to provide power to critical systems during an outage.

Emergency Operations Plan: A plan that defines what constitutes a disaster as well as the organization's disaster preparations and response procedures, articulating both internal and external stakeholder expectations. It 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.

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

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

Escalation Process: The process of communicating issues and prioritizing updates within an organization.

Filters/Search: Filters help narrow the selection of records that are displayed on a match list. Customized filters/search options include such things as language, hours, fee structure.

Fiscal Controls: Procedures, policies, and processes that help monitor and control the allocation and usage of financial resources.

Focus Group: Meetings, generally one to two hours in length, during which 8 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 individuals to determine whether their needs were met or not. If their needs were not met, the I&R service aims to learn why, including potential barriers. Follow-up ensures that vulnerable persons are connected with essential resources.

Governance: Encompasses the system by which an organization is controlled and operates. This includes the procedures by which it, and its people, are held to account.

Human-Centered Design: A problem-solving technique that puts real people at the center of the website development process, enabling I&R services to create products/websites that resonate with and are tailored to the audience's needs.

Human Services: A broad range of professional disciplines, programs, and activities that aim to enhance the overall well-being, quality of life, and functioning of individuals and communities. These services are designed to meet various human needs, address social issues, and provide support to those facing challenges or crises. Human services encompass a wide spectrum of fields, including social work, governing, counseling, healthcare, education, housing, employment assistance, and more.

Human Services Database Specification (HSDS): An open-source data exchange standard that enables interoperability among resource databases, so data can be shared among different data systems via easier export/import or API. HSDS was developed by the Open Referral Initiative and was endorsed by AIRS (Inform USA) in 2018.

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

- ✔ Opening the contact and establishing rapport.

- ✔ Assessment of the situation and/or exploring needs (stated or unstated).
- ✔ Clarification to ensure an understanding of the situation.
- ✔ Providing appropriate information and/or referrals.
- ✔ Closing the contact.

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 those 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).

I&R Software: A computer application developed for 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, recording contact transactions, 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.

Incident Command System (ICS): A pan-Canadian command and control structure used to help manage emergency incidents and planned events.

Inclusion Criteria: The guidelines an I&R service uses to define the content of its resource database. Some organizations may prefer the phrase "resource directory listing criteria” instead of inclusion criteria.

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 Service Delivery Methods: The I&R service provides additional ways for the general public and other human services professionals to independently access and retrieve community resource information. These methods provide an alternative to one-to-one interaction with a Community Resource Specialist (e.g., online resource database, menu-driven interactive voice response (IVR), pre-recorded audio information, social media messages).

Indexing: The process of assigning codes/terms to resource records that can be used as search methods within the database to make the data retrievable.

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

Inform USA Accreditation: The professional credential that is awarded internationally by Inform USA 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*.

Inform USA Certification: The professional credential that is awarded internationally by Inform USA 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.

Inform USA I&R Training Manual: A comprehensive publication developed and published by Inform USA that provides an introduction to the practice of information and referral. It is an integral part of Community Resource Specialists' initial orientation and/or training programs - including those who provide assessment, navigation and referral services to clients, and those who curate resource databases.

Information and Assistance (I&A): A service for older adults that, within the aging network, provides an array of services such as: providing information on opportunities and services available within their communities, assessing the problems and capacities of individuals, connecting individuals to available services, providing adequate follow-up to the extent practicable, and serving the community as a whole of older individuals, particularly those with the greatest social and economic needs. In practice, I&A, which may also be known as Information and Referral/Assistance, may support older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, and family members to access information and referrals as well as receive assistance with connecting to services and problem-solving.

Informed Consent: The explicit granting of permission by an individual or their 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.

Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRs): An automated telephony system that interacts with individuals, 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 (KPIs): See Organizational Effectiveness Section Appendix

- **KPIs for Service Delivery Management**
- **KPIs for Community Resource Specialists**
- **KPIs for Resource Database Management**
- **KPIs for Database Curators**

Keyword Index: A keyword index is a separate classification structure that is generally organized alphabetically and requires its own field within a resource database. The Database Curator chooses one or more keywords in addition to a classification/taxonomy term. Community Resource Specialists can conduct searches of the keyword index as an additional option.

Learning Style: Describes how learners gather, sift through, interpret, organize, come to conclusions about, and "store" information. May include a combination of visual, aural, verbal, and kinesthetic methods based on sensory approaches used in the training.

Legislative Advocacy: Entails contacting a legislator and sharing your views on an issue. This helps to increase their awareness about an issue, and encourage them to vote a specific way on a bill. This can include attempts to influence the introduction or review of pending bills, ordinances, or administrative rulings, as well as the passage or defeat of such legislation or its content.

Location/Site: The physical sites where people can access services provided by an organization/agency. Most organizations have a main location; many have additional locations or branch offices.

Logical Observation Identifiers Names and Codes (LOINC®): The international standard for identifying health measurements, observations, and documents.

Machine-Readable Format: Structured data in a data format that can be automatically read and processed by a computer (e.g., CSV, JSON, XML).

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. For example, certain professionals are required to report to authorities if they see evidence of child abuse/neglect or elder abuse/neglect, or have knowledge that someone is likely to be dangerous to themselves or others. Laws in the United States and Canadian provinces and territories outline specific reporting requirements for professionals if they have information related to public or private safety issues.

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

Met Needs: Services are available and referral(s) are provided or information is made available to an individual in response to a statement of a problem/need (problem solving).

Meta-Tagging: Meta tags are small snippets of text that are embedded within the HTML 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.

Mobile-Friendly: Websites whose content is easily readable on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Websites can be checked for user friendliness through applications such as the **Google Mobile-Friendly Test**. Also called "responsive web design."

Multi-Channel Services: I&R services that are provided through a variety of channels including: in-person, telephone, email, instant messaging (IM), chatbot, text/SMS messaging, online/live chat, video relay service, social media, website, 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.

National Incident Management System (NIMS): A comprehensive, nationwide systematic approach to incident management that supports the ability of government agencies at all levels. It also allows 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.

Non-Proprietary: Not protected by trademark, patent, or copyright.

Organization/Agency Record: A record in an I&R resource database that includes all of the data elements that define the organization, 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. In I&R the outcomes measured are typically related to attitude, behavior, condition, or status. One way of collecting outcome data is through Customer Satisfaction Surveys which explore the experience (attitude or behavior). Another way is through follow-ups which explore whether the individual's problem or need was addressed (condition or status).

Outreach: Coordinated 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, keeping in mind the capacity of the service/human service delivery system.

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

Personal Identifiable Information (PII): Any representation of information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, either alone (direct), or when combined with other personal or identifying information that is linked or linkable to a specific individual (indirect).

Phantom Services: Services that the organization/agency says are offered, but might not have the resources to provide in a sustained way.

Policies: A written document formally adopted by an organization's governing body that guides decisions and actions; a high-level statement by management specifying an objective that requires mandatory compliance by all persons within the organization.

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

Primary Services: Entry point services that an eligible person can directly access without being involved in other organization/agency services.

Problem Solving: Helping individuals identify alternative strategies or solutions or overcoming resistance to options, such as a reluctance to ask for assistance from family members or friends.

Procedure: A framework that guides people on how to perform certain tasks effectively and efficiently. They put policies into action by providing step-by-step instructions on how to complete a task.

Program: A group of services (some primary and some secondary) that are organized and delivered together.

Program Evaluation: 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 the overall operation of the I&R service.

Protocol: Set of procedures generally disseminated in written form, that explain what will be done, when, how, and why.

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 entity.

Quality Assurance: A system of procedures, checks, audits that are undertaken to ensure that an organization's products and services meet the expectations and needs of the people they serve.

Quality Indicator: 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 a contact system that holds an inquiry until a Community Resource Specialist becomes available. Persons who have waited the longest are generally the ones who get their contact answered first.

Racism: A set of attitudes that characterizes people based on their race, color, origin, or ancestry, and contends the supposed superiority of one race above another.

Rapport: A natural bond that is based on the presence of trust, respect, harmony, mutual understanding and/or empathy to accomplish a stated result.

Referrals: Organization or program identified by Community Resource Specialists that meet the assessed needs of the individual and are offered as a potential solution(s).

Remote Work: An arrangement that allows at least a portion of scheduled hours to be completed from a location other than the standard place of work (office) with work-from-home as one of the typical options.

Rescue Protocol: Attempt(s) to make an active intervention to save an individual's life when a lethality assessment reveals that life-threatening acts have already been set in motion, or is imminent. Included should be procedures in situations where the individual is unable or unwilling to provide a telephone number or address to make rescue possible.

Resource Database: An electronic body of information about community resources, organized into standardized resource profiles, maintained by the

I&R service that can be accessed in a variety of ways. It 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. Together, these form resource records, and they contain at least the Inform USA mandatory data elements, if that information is available. The resource database supports the I&R process but also serves as an inventory of human services for the community.

Resource Record: A standardized set of information that is gathered about each service provider in the resource database. Included are data elements such as: a description about the organization itself, the services it provides, the conditions under which services are available, 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 staff or 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 may 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? Is there an identified time frame? Are there other risk indicators such depression, hopelessness, feelings of isolation, substance use disorders, significant recent loss? This is sometimes called a lethality or suicide risk assessment.

Sample Size: A statistically significant number of individuals drawn from a larger population. It is important to have a sufficient number of responses so that meaningful (valid and reliable) conclusions can be drawn from the data. For a Sample Size Chart, please see the **Service Delivery Appendix**.

Secondary Services: These services are available only to individuals already receiving primary services.

See Also References: These identify related, but not identical, terms in other parts of the 211HSIS. They help to ensure that users find the most appropriate term.

Self-Determination: The right of individuals 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 insufficient to meet demand. Some examples include services that are 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 individual.

Services: The types of assistance an organization/agency delivers. Operationally, services are specific activities that can be classified using taxonomy terms.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH): Non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. These include factors such as: economic stability, educational access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.

Social Media: Technology that facilitates the ability for people to create and share content which may include text, images, video, audio, and multimedia communications through their personal and professional networks.

Specialized I&R Service: Programs that maintain and share information about community resources that are relevant to specific target populations.

Staff Evaluation: The systematic process of reviewing the work of individual employees and volunteers, in accordance with their job descriptions, to provide feedback on performance.

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/Provincewide 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, and consistent.

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.

Sustainability: The ability of a program to provide quality services to its clients and exercise responsible fiscal management related to program funding. This involves exploring and securing diversified funding streams.

System Advocacy: An effort to change policies, rules, or laws that determine how services are provided across a community, region, or state. The objective of system advocacy is to make changes in the conditions, structures, or institutions that would benefit the community at large.

Talk Time: The actual time a Community Resource Specialist spends with a caller from the second the call is picked up until it is disconnected. Some contact center solutions include Hold Time as part of the overall Talk Time. It is important to verify whether Hold Time is included in the software's calculation of Talk Time.

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, single parents."), in the eligibility or description fields. Target populations can also be pinpointed when indexing by choosing a Target Population term from the 211HSIS to append to the selected service term(s).

Technology: In an I&R context 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 (IVR), community kiosks, and online databases.

Text: The transmission of brief written messages to a device such as a mobile device, using SMS (Short Message Service) or MMS (Multimedia Message Service).

TTY/TDD Equipment: Teletypewriters (TTY), Telecommunications for the Deaf (TDD), and Text Telephones (TT) are special telecommunications equipment used by people who use adapted telephones due to hearing loss or speech impairment.

Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS): Type of continual power system that provides automated backup to electric power and protects equipment in case of a power failure.

Unmet Needs: Instances where no resources are available to meet an individual's assessed needs and no referrals can be made. A pattern of unmet needs may lead to identification of service gaps.

Update Verification Procedures: Processes developed by an organization and used by the Database Curators to validate the accuracy of suggested changes in the resource database record(s). This can include updates made as interim changes or during the annual review.

Use Reference: Synonyms for preferred terms that allow users to easily find a type of service without knowing the exact wording used in the classification system/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) 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): Group of nonprofit organizations with a shared specialized focus of 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 organization picks up, introduces the contact, and then drops off the line, allowing the person to discuss their situation privately with the other individual.

211HSIS (Human Services Indexing System): Formerly known as 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services. The classification system maintained by 211 LA County is used by 2-1-1s, United Ways, Aging and Disability organizations, and other I&R providers 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 https://211hsis.org/

INFORM USA STANDARDS REVISION PROCESS

Inform USA reviews and revises the *Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral* at least every three years. Changes to the Inform USA Standards are the basis for updates to the accreditation, and certification programs. All 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. Inform USA must support creative alternatives that achieve the desired outcome of quality performance.
- not be unduly 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.

Essentially, the process involves:

- a group of subject matter experts with broad expertise and representation of the field is convened, called the Inform USA Standards Committee.
- all Inform USA members receive an invitation to submit their recommended changes, removals and additions to the current edition of the Standards.
- the Standards Committee reviews all received recommendations from the field, and also conducts a line-by-line review of the existing text. In some areas, additional subject matter experts may be invited to participate in certain sections.
- a final draft is shared with members for a final Member Comment Phase.
- The Inform USA Board approves the final version recommended by the Inform USA Standards Committee.

Acknowledgements

Inform USA would like to thank the Inform USA Standards Committee, under the leadership of Pamela Hillier for developing the 10th edition of the Inform USA Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral.

Cinda Watkins
United Way of Southwestern PA -
211 Southwest
Pennsylvania, USA

Diana French
Age Well
Vermont, USA

Edward Perry
211 Illinois
Illinois, USA

Gina Strafford-Ahmed
211 DuPage County
Illinois, USA

Jennie Pollak
Chair, Accreditation Commission
Michigan 211
Michigan, USA

Jennifer Abels
Inform USA Accreditation Director
South Dakota, USA

Katie Appold
Inform USA Executive Director
Michigan, USA

Resource Database Consultants:
Kathy Sheridan, Michigan 211
Greg Bloom, Open Referral

Kristen Buckley
Findhelp Information Services | 211 Central
Ontario, Canada

Linda Daily
North Carolina, USA

Mary Miller
United Way Worldwide
Virginia, USA

Nanette Relave
Chair, Certification Commission
ADvancing States
Virginia, USA

Pamela Hillier
Chair, Standards Committee
Community Connection
Ontario, Canada

Sandra Ray
Inform USA Program Director
Colorado, USA

Sandra De Steno
211 Toledo
Ohio, USA

Vicki Mize
Inform USA Accreditation Reviewer
Texas, USA