

211: Advancing the Provincial Consolidated System Information Resources Working Group Minutes, August 3rd and 19th, 2005

Present: Christine Berry (Information Oakville), Ross Cooling (Community Connection, Collingwood), Barb McLachlan (Information Windsor), Julie Giesbrecht (Information Niagara), Ian Kellogg (August 3, Findhelp Information Services), John Allec (Findhelp Information Services)

1. Minutes of July 14th meeting

Minutes accepted as distributed.

2. 211 Terms of Use/Inclusion Policy

The group was asked by the Steering Committee to produce a draft Terms of Use/Inclusion Policy that could be used by all Ontario 211 centres, based on the existing one posted on the 211 Toronto web site but incorporating ideas from the policies of the other centres. Several drafts were developed and discussed throughout the month. Several concerns that came up at the first meeting were clarified and resolved before the second meeting.

It became clear as work proceeded that (as is the situation at 211 Toronto), the “general” inclusion policy included within the Terms of Use needs to be a condensed version of a much larger and more detailed Collection Development Policy at each centre, approved by each centre’s board of directors and to be used for day-to-day guidance on grey areas and anomalies. Tentatively, there does not seem to be a need for these local Collection Development Policies to exactly match each other, as long as nothing in them contradicts the generic 211 Ontario policy. John has distributed Findhelp’s policy to the rest of the group for their interest.

It was resolved (with input from members of the Steering Committee in between the meetings) that lower priority services such as service clubs, churches, schools, individuals, etc would continue to be excluded from official 211 collections. Each 211 web site, though, will have the option of feature and highlight supplementary portals to information on such topics, as long as those collections are clearly distinguished from the sets of 211 data. Also, a paragraph was added to the Terms of Use inviting users to call their local 211 centre or other community information centres in the area for information beyond the scope of the 211 sites.

Julie suggested as a compromise that “subject records” could also be posted within the 211 data to direct people to URLs for such portals, so that someone searching the database for these topics would at least find a pointer to the information they were searching for.

Among other major issues:

- Education is listed as a first priority service by non-Toronto centres, but agreed to keep as a second priority service (though with services such as adult basic education falling under the first-priority “Employment and Training”).
- Findhelp interprets the first priority “Home Support” to include transportation services, but it is a prominent and distinct service in other areas. Decision to add as a separate first priority service, though to avoid misunderstanding we will say “Public and specialized transportation”.
- Re commercial organizations, decision to clarify that 211 will list commercial organizations that provide *first priority* services not offered by the nonprofit sector.

There was discussion about some different interpretations people have about what types of questions are expected or not expected to be answered by 211 centres (as opposed to what data will be provided on 211 sites). Beyond the mandate of this group, but it was confirmed that generally the scope for this is fairly open and generous. Note that 211 counsellors will have access to much more information than that posted on public 211 web sites.

3. Style Guide and Data Entry Rules

John is overdue to present the group’s first couple of recommendations to the InformOntario community for feedback (a necessary step before recommendations are given to the Steering Committee and the InformOntario board for approval). Some thought given to presenting one entire package of recommendations rather than staggering them throughout the next few months, but agreed that it is more practical to present them one by one, or perhaps in groups (such as all “geography issues”).

John will distribute copies of the existing InformOntario resources available for reference, official and unofficial. It was agreed to follow Barb’s suggestion that there be two distinct documents to avoid confusion, one re style decisions (Mon-Fri vs Monday-to-Friday, etc), and another on “Data Entry Rules”, re actual content guidelines. John said he is chronically confused about the latter and would prefer something clearer to distinguish it from the Style Guide, and the group came up with “Field Definitions and Usage” (even though that “data elements” is probably more correct and generic than “fields”).

Agreed that we will aim to finish a complete draft of these by the time of the InformOntario conference in November.

4. Next meeting

Wednesday, September 14th, 10:30 a.m. – to start focusing on geography issues (Location, Area Served, Intersection, Addresses, etc).