



**Feasibility Study for a
Web-Based Community Resource Inventory**

Summary of Key Stakeholder Interviews

Prepared for the Alliance for Human Services
by the South Florida Regional Planning Council

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Introduction

The Alliance for Human Services (www.allianceforhumanservices.org) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the development of a Health and Social Services Master Plan (SSMP) for Miami-Dade County. The Alliance Board of Directors includes all major funders of health and social services as well as representatives from the business community, service providers, consumers, caregivers, advocates and faith-based organizations.

One of the priority areas identified in the SSMP is Countywide Services, which has as its primary goal “to ensure that consumers and providers have universal access to timely and accurate information about available community services including emergency food assistance and legal services.” Two outcomes targeted in the current plan are increased access to timely and accurate information regarding community resources, eligibility criteria, service hours and languages spoken, and completion of a feasibility study for a web-based resource and referral system.

In April, 2002, the Alliance hired the South Florida Regional Planning Council (SFRPC) to assist in the preparation of the feasibility study, which was designed with three parts:

- Part I - interviews of key stakeholders, in order to gauge the level of interest and identify any issues, while refining the vision of the system to be developed;
- Part II - a study of models and best practices around the country, to see how other communities collect and make available the agency, program, service and funding data for human services, and how they are implementing the new 211 human services information and referral system; and
- Part III - the development of a set of implementation options with the associated costs.

This report is Part I of the feasibility study.

Approach

Alliance staff convened the Web-Based I&R (Information and Referral) Committee, composed of representatives of the organizations that sit on the board and other community stakeholders, to guide development of the study. Alliance staff approved the draft problem statement and vision transcribed below.

Problem Statement - Customers of human services in Miami-Dade County have difficulty obtaining accurate and timely information about the services available because of the proliferation of information and referral services, with the resulting fragmentation in the system; the difficulty and cost of maintaining current information about providers; and cost barriers to widespread use of the most comprehensive source of information. Case managers in provider organizations also have difficulty providing accurate referrals to their clients. Funders and system planners do not have easy access to information about gaps and overlaps in the service delivery system, in order to better target the use of scarce resources.

Vision - Development of an integrated, comprehensive web-based database that will provide an always current source of information about the programs and services available in Miami-Dade County. It will ensure up-to-date and consistent information for its many users, including customers, information and referral services, case managers at provider organizations and human service system planners.

The draft vision was further detailed with a set of nine bullets that spell out features of the system to be developed (see the full Vision Statement in Attachment A).

Stakeholders were divided into four groups for the purpose of interviews, and a separate interview guide was developed for each (see Attachment A):

- funders of health and human services;
- existing information and referral services;
- providers of health and human services; and
- organizations involved in the preparation of needs assessments and system planning for health and human services.

Alliance staff helped to compile the list of organizations and individuals to be interviewed. The draft Problem Statement, Vision and the corresponding interview guides were sent by e-mail to each of the stakeholders in mid-May. Interviewees were requested to read the Problem Statement and Vision and then respond to the questions in the interview guide, which could be returned by e-mail. A total of 21 responses were received, out of 44 interview requests sent (see Attachment B).

Overview of the Results

Interviews were returned by stakeholders in each of the four groups, which ensures that the results cover issues that are unique to each of the groups. In general, there was broad agreement with the Problem Statement and support for the draft vision.

However, there also was recognition that the proposal is ambitious, and that successful implementation will require coordination with other similar activities, collaboration among the many stakeholders, and sustainable funding. In particular, as Miami-Dade County looks for best practices models for the implementation of 211, a countywide information and referral service, it is necessary to articulate the connections with the development of the proposed database. In this regard, among the interviewees, there was no agreement on what agency should host the proposed database - the names mentioned most often were Switchboard of Miami and the Alliance for Human Services.

Other points worth emphasizing here include

- Most funders showed reluctance to require their funded agencies to keep the information current, and do not all show an understanding of the potential benefits of a comprehensive inventory of programs and funding.
- Providers showed concern about the extra workload this could cause, and probably need to be further informed about the potential benefits of the proposed system in regard to reduced need to respond to other surveys.

- Many I&R service providers use Switchboard’s Help Pages, but some have other systems. All of these are stakeholders in the design and implementation of 211, as well as the proposed database. Other services that do not use Switchboard’s database need to be identified.
- There is general concern about the difficulty of keeping the data accurate and current.

Funders

The proposed community resource inventory is intended to provide critical input into the decisions of funders as they attempt to allocate scarce resources to high priorities in the community. The collection of funding information from providers, along with the description of programs and services, will enable the compilation of system-wide information on what services are funded and by whom. This will help to enhance the understanding of how much is being funded, and where, making it possible to identify gaps and overlaps in service.

Several funders conduct their own needs assessments, although most appear to be occasional rather than on a regular cycle. The Alliance for Aging conducted a county-wide needs assessment of elders in 1995 and is doing an update now with funding from the Health Foundation of South Florida. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice funds the Comprehensive Strategy Plan for Miami-Dade (Social Services Master Plan). The Knight Foundation published results of its Community Indicators Project for Miami in January 2000.

Other direct sources of information to support funding decisions include guidelines from federal and state funding sources, information submitted by providers in their grant applications, site visits to funded agencies, and waiting lists of persons requesting services. Funders often rely on direct contacts with other funders to learn about what each is funding. Review committees convened by the Alliance, Miami-Dade County and the Florida Department of Children and Families also play an important role. Finally, annual reports, and publications from the Donor’s Forum, the Foundation Center and the Chronicle of Philanthropy were also identified as sources of information about what is being funded by others.

On balance, some respondents felt that they had difficulty obtaining agency, program and service data to support their needs assessments, and some did not.

The Alliance for Aging operates in-house the Elder Hotline, serving Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, with funding from the Florida Department of Elder Affairs (Older Americans Act). The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice reports that it funds a hotline at Switchboard of Miami targeted at children and families in need of services. The Knight Foundation also reports that it provides information and referral funding to Switchboard of Miami.

The vision was generally viewed with approval, but one respondent observed that this “has been advanced in the past but it has always been difficult to carry out due to funding and to ‘buy in’ by all the stakeholders.” Another raised questions about whether the database would include only descriptive information about programs or also information about individuals served by the programs. The same observer pointed out that the terms of success for the undertaking are not described, and recommended that they be spelled out.

Most funders showed reluctance to require the providers they fund to submit and update the information about their agency, programs and services in a centralized, web-based database. The Health Foundation of South Florida was the lone funder to agree without restriction. The Alliance for Aging pointed out that their providers already maintain information on funded services, and they would be unable to require or fund doing so into an alternate system. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) indicated it would depend on the extent of the information required. South Florida Workforce currently contracts to have similar work done to meet its own needs, and would not be prepared to duplicate that effort. The Knight Foundation agreed to encourage compliance, but not to make it a condition of funding. The Dade Community Foundation said it would depend on the type of grant. DJJ, the Knight Foundation and the Health Foundation of South Florida agreed to consider funding a computer purchase and an Internet connection as allowable expenses to enable providers to participate in the proposed system.

Funders generally felt it was premature to define who should host the proposed database. Although one felt that Switchboard of Miami would be the correct choice, another suggested that this project would require an agency whose sole business is database hosting and information management, and could not be a “sideline, as it is now at Switchboard.” Another felt that there was insufficient information at this time. Other possible hosts mentioned include the Alliance, the United Way and Miami-Dade County.

There was qualified support for funding the development of the proposed database from four of the six respondents (South Florida Workforce, the Knight Foundation, the Health Foundation of South Florida, and Donor’s Forum). The Alliance on Aging indicates that its state funding for this activity is restricted. DJJ indicates it already has a web-based information system.

Potential difficulties identified by funders for carrying out this project include:

- funding;
- selection of a host agency;
- confidentiality;
- mandatory participation (if it is voluntary, the database will be incomplete);
- getting accurate information from providers, and deciding who should be included;
- quality assurance (if the data are not verified, it will be inaccurate); and
- ease of access (if it is not cross-index accessible, it will be difficult to find information).

One funder asked “Is there really a desire for such a service?” Another recommended providing incentives (a free computer, technical training) to encourage participation.

Information and Referral (I&R) Services

Existing information and referral services in Miami-Dade County are critical stakeholders because the proposed web-based database is intended to enhance the services they provide. The problem statement declares that “customers of human services have difficulty obtaining accurate and timely information about the services available because of the proliferation of information and referral services, with the resulting fragmentation in the system; the difficulty and cost of maintaining current information about providers; and cost barriers to widespread use of the most comprehensive source of information.”

Seven organizations provided responses about the information and referral services they offer. The county's largest single provider of I&R services, Switchboard of Miami, maintains help lines through which it provides referral services, and also offers a subscription service to its database. It includes providers in both Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, and contains information on over 4,500 agencies/programs. Switchboard's database is managed in IRIS 2.30, a software product that also is used by First Call For Help of Broward, and which has built-in capabilities for making the database available in a printed directory, on diskette and over the Internet. A 12-month subscription to the Switchboard database costs non-profit organizations \$600 for a single site; additional sites cost \$450 yearly. There currently are approximately 130 subscribers to the online Help Pages.

They also publish a printed directory every 18 months, and costs \$65. Five of the other interviewees use Switchboard's Help Pages (Family and Children Faith Coalition, Community Care Resource, Legal Services of Greater Miami, Team Metro and the Alliance for Aging). Community Case Management uses Service Delivery Information System (SDIS), which is also used by Community Care Resource for HIV-related referrals. The Alliance for Aging uses Refer 2000, which is similar to IRIS, in addition to the Help Pages. This software enables them to publish a directory for each county, which is sold for \$20 (Miami-Dade) or \$10 (Monroe). Both Family and Children Faith Coalition and Community Case Management indicate that they use Microsoft Access for part of their database management. Community Case Management makes its I&R information available to other users at no cost, but does not explain how.

Switchboard updates its database daily in response to spontaneous requests from providers or changes initiated in response to return calls from customers who were unable to find or contact services to which they were referred. Switchboard sends database printouts of agency and program information to providers for updating, although it did not indicate how often. The Alliance for Aging also updates as needed and annually. Community Case Management processes updates "as soon as new information is received," but there is no indication whether it surveys providers to ensure up-to-date information. Family and Children Faith Coalition has not yet decided how to update the data it is collecting.

Switchboard reports that it has difficulty obtaining agency, program and service data from providers - many agencies are slow to return information to them, and calls and e-mails sometimes are ignored. Community Case Management estimates that about 15% of its inquiries are difficult. Family and Children Faith Coalition observes that it is hard to establish trust between themselves and the providers, and they spend a lot of time verifying that the information they receive is true. The Alliance for Aging indicates it has no problems updating its database.

Those interviewed showed general support for the vision of the proposed integrated, comprehensive web-based database, but several acknowledged the potential challenges in making it a reality, including funding and keeping the data current.

Both Switchboard of Miami and Community Case Management showed a willingness to contribute resources to the proposed system, especially quality assurance. The other agencies indicated that they did not have resources to share, but the Alliance for Aging, Team Metro and

Family and Children Faith Coalition indicated a willingness to look for ways to support the endeavor collaboratively.

The question of where the database should be hosted brought varied responses. Switchboard of Miami states that “We, more than any other agency have the experience and the capacity to host the database. We currently maintain the only comprehensive database of social service and governmental resources in Miami-Dade and Monroe County.” Switchboard referenced four information and referral software packages that they are considering for moving forward (IRIS 3.0, REFER’00, Alliance Network 6.4, and Resource House). Other suggested hosts include Miami-Dade County and the Alliance for Human Services.

Existing I&R services identified the following difficulties for carrying out the project:

- updates, database maintenance and upkeep, accuracy;
- security;
- connectivity/interface concerns, access to technology by providers;
- funding, staff resources; and
- cooperation and involvement.

Several of the interviewees commented on the need to work collaboratively with existing efforts in order to avoid duplication.

Providers of Human Services

The proposed web-based community resource inventory is fundamentally dependent upon information about agencies, programs, services and funding to be collected from providers in order to work. The difficulty of obtaining that information in a timely fashion, and the need to make it available to a large number of institutional and individual users, for both information and referral services and system planning, is the primary challenge faced. Today, providers must give information to many separate information and referral services, all of whom need to know when a new service is offered or a telephone number changes. Moreover, a lot of the same information is necessary whenever the provider applies for funding. The proposed database offers a user-friendly one-stop process for providers to update their agency, program service and funding information. From this single database, provider information will then be distributed to the many different users, who all will have access to the same information. Quality assurance will be required only once.

Five providers responded to the interview, one of which by phone (Human Services Coalition). In general, providers receive surveys requesting information about the agency, programs, services and funding two or three times each year.

When asked how they decide whether and when to apply for additional resources to provide services where they currently are not available, some of the respondents indicated that they are responsive to funding availability, but only one made reference to a community needs assessment. Nonetheless, there was agreement that it would be helpful to have a regularly updated overview of what services are available in order to support decisions to apply for funding.

Respondents indicated that they have no serious difficulties getting a satisfactory number of referrals, which probably reflects both the multitude of referral services and the high level of demand for services in Miami-Dade County. Respondents also showed willingness to fill out timely updates to agency, program, service and funding information online, but they also observed the importance of reducing the duplication of effort and the time and staff resources required to keep the information current.

Providers who responded to the survey were solidly supportive of the vision of the proposed system, and there was agreement that online updates using the Internet is the right way to go. One provider raised a concerns with the frequency of staff turnover at provider agencies and the difficulty of ensuring continuity in the information flow. Another pointed out the vast differences in technological capabilities among providers, numerous existing reporting and record keeping requirements, and the need to include specific service availability information to keep providers from receiving excess referrals when they can no longer accept additional clients.

Providers were not of a single mind with regard to who should host the database described in the vision. One suggested Switchboard of Miami, and one recommended the Alliance for Human Services. Another suggested “some impartial agency yet to be identified.” And one raised questions about how the determination would be made, suggesting that the issues surrounding the implementation of 211 in Miami-Dade County are closely related to this proposal, and would need to be considered at the same time. In addition, according to this respondent, the implementation of an eligibility screening program should be part of the discussion as well.

Providers identified the following difficulties for carrying out the project:

- quality assurance, reliability;
- system integrity, security;
- technological capacity of the host agency;
- funding resources;
- making it easier for providers, not just adding another layer of reporting requirements; and
- reconciling different timelines for different (funding?) sources.

Human Service System Planners

The creation of a community resource inventory through the proposed web-based database is a substantial enhancement to the improvements in information and referral for human service customers. It offers the potential for those charged with improving the overall delivery of human services in Miami-Dade County to be able to see the system as a whole, to identify gaps and overlaps, and to highlight both substantive and geographical areas where resources need to be directed to address the needs of the county’s residents. The collection of information about the funding of programs and services, in addition to the descriptive information used to provide referrals, represents an increased burden for the providers. However, this may be offset by a reduction in the number of surveys providers must fill out whenever funders and system planners need to compile an overview of system resources.

Three interviews were returned by organizations involved in human service system planning. The Center on Aging at Florida International University conducts needs assessments on a project by project basis. The Florida Department of Children and Families referenced the data gathering and mapping (GIS) work that they carry out on a regular basis, in addition to their service center customer satisfaction surveys. The United Way referenced other needs assessments available in the community, but also indicated that it does produce more focused reports as part of special initiatives (such as the Community Voices Community Dialogues Report).

All three indicated that they use data available from other sources, along with program evaluations, focus groups and phone surveys to gather information about gaps and overlaps in service. The United Way highlighted the following criteria for identifying gaps in services: (1) comparative information on funding, (2) waiting lists, (3) impact of the gap on clients within the framework of the service continuum, (4) number of clients affected, and (5) demographic and geographic breakdown. The United Way also demonstrated the strongest linkages among funders, information and referral services, providers and system planners for resource analysis.

The vision of a comprehensive, integrated, web-enabled database was strongly supported by all three respondents, although it was considered “ambitious” by one. One respondent suggested that the system be designed to provide information on the actual (real time) availability of services, since some callers to information and referral services receive a list of providers, but once they make the calls they discover that none of the agencies can help because their capacity is exhausted.

System planning respondents were divided on what agency should host the database, with one suggesting the Alliance for Human Services, one suggesting Switchboard of Miami, and one looking for additional information.

Difficulties identified for carrying out the project include:

- community-wide cooperation;
- funding to ensure sustainability;
- technological capacity; and
- keeping the information up to date.

The Center on Aging observed the importance of ensuring the availability of this information for research on a routine basis.

Attachment A

Problem Statement, Vision and Interview Guides



Web-Based Community Resource Inventory

Problem Statement

Customers of human services in Miami-Dade County have difficulty obtaining accurate and timely information about the services available because of the proliferation of information and referral services, with the resulting fragmentation in the system; the difficulty and cost of maintaining current information about providers; and cost barriers to widespread use of the most comprehensive source of information. Case managers in provider organizations also have difficulty providing accurate referrals to their clients. Funders and system planners do not have easy access to information about gaps and overlaps in the service delivery system, in order to better target the use of scarce resources.

Vision

Development of an integrated, comprehensive web-based database that will provide an always current source of information about the programs and services available in Miami-Dade County. It will ensure up-to-date and consistent information for its many users, including customers, information and referral services, case managers at provider organizations and human service system planners.

- Human service providers will use a single, web-based system to initially record their agency, program, service and funding information, including eligibility requirements and service hours. They will use the same system to regularly update this information whenever new programs and services or changes in existing programs and services require it. Providers will be encouraged to refer all additional requests for information to the integrated online database.
- Reporting capabilities in the system will be able to produce a variety of reports about programs and services in Miami-Dade County, and agency profiles suitable for grant applications, monitoring visits by funders, etc.
- Funders will require timely updates, and will fund the infrastructure (computer, Internet connection) necessary to participate in the system.
- A partner (or partners) will be designated to conduct quality assurance (completeness, consistency, accuracy) on update information before it is posted. Update access will be controlled through passwords.
- 211 and other information and referral (I&R) services will be able to draw their databases from a constantly updated and quality assured database.
- Direct public access to the same information will be made available over the Internet and at kiosks located around the County.
- Case managers at provider organizations who wish to make referrals for their own customers will be able to access the same database, and could establish a linkage between an eligibility determination program and the providers to be referred.
- To support system planning functions, information on program funding will be cross-checked with funders to ensure that the aggregate resources allocated to human services in Miami-Dade County are current at any point in time.
- Client information related to referrals, eligibility and case management could be added to the system.

Interview Guide - Funder

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____ Date _____

1. Do you conduct a community needs assessment to aid in the allocation of funding? If so, please describe.
2. What other criteria do you use to support funding allocation decisions?
3. How do you know what other funders are funding?
4. Do you currently have difficulty obtaining agency, program and service data to support the assessment of needs?
5. Do you currently fund 211 or some other I&R (Information and Referral) service? Which ones and how much?
6. Please comment on the “vision” provided to you.
7. Would you be willing to require the providers you fund to timely update their information? If not, please explain.
8. Would you be willing to consider a computer purchase and Internet connection as allowable costs, when necessary, to ensure provider participation in this system?
9. Who do you think should host the database described in the vision?
10. Would you be willing to help fund a web-based I&R database?
11. What difficulties can you identify for carrying out this project?
12. Are there any other issues you would like to bring up?

Interview Guide - Information and Referral (I&R) Service

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____ Date _____

1. What information and referral software do you use (name, version, last update, database engine, programmable capabilities)?
2. How often do you update the provider information in your database? How are updates carried out?
3. Do you make your I&R information available to other users? Is there a cost?
4. Do you currently have difficulty obtaining agency, program and service data from providers?
5. Please comment on the “vision” provided to you.
6. Would you be willing to contribute resources to the proposed system, especially quality assurance?
7. Who do you think should host the database? What software do you recommend?
8. What difficulties can you identify for carrying out this project?
9. Are there any other issues you would like to bring up?

Interview Guide - Provider

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____ Date _____

1. How often do you get surveys to request information about the agency, programs, services and funding?
2. How do you decide whether and when to apply for additional resources to provide services where they currently are not available?
3. Would it be helpful to have a regularly updated overview of what services are available where and when in order to support those decisions?
4. Do you get a satisfactory number of referrals?
5. Would you be willing to fill out timely updates to agency, program, service and funding information online?
6. Please comment on the “vision” provided to you.
7. Would the information and referral system described in the vision be useful to you if it is available over the Internet?
8. Who do you think should host the database described in the vision?
9. What difficulties can you identify for carrying out this project?
10. Are there any other issues you would like to bring up?

Interview Guide - System Planner / Needs Assessment

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____ Date _____

1. Do you conduct a community needs assessment to aid in the analysis of system allocation of resources? Please describe what you do and how often.
2. How else do you gather information about gaps and overlaps of services (resource allocation) in Miami-Dade County?
3. What criteria are especially important in identifying gaps in services?
4. Are you currently linked in any way to funders, information and referral (I&R) services and providers for information sharing?
5. Please comment on the “vision” provided to you.
6. Who do you think should host the database described in the vision?
7. What difficulties can you identify for carrying out this project?
8. Are there any other issues you would like to bring up?

Attachment B

List of Stakeholders Interviewed

List of Interview Requests Sent

Funders of Human Services

*Isabel Afanador, Circuit 11 Manager, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice
*Hodding Carter, President and CEO, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (Penelope McPhee, Vice President and Chief Program Officer)
*Steven E. Marcus, President and CEO, Health Foundation of South Florida
*Ruth Shack, President, Dade Community Foundation (Charisse Grant, Director of Programs)
*Harriet Spivak, Executive Director, South Florida Workforce Board (Jerome Leyendecker, Assistant Director)
*Steven Weisberg, Executive Director, Alliance for Aging, Inc. (Pedro Jove, Director of Administration)
Charles Auslander, District Administrator, Florida Department of Children and Families, District 11
Dean Taylor, Director, Miami-Dade County Department of Human Services
Harve A. Mogul, President, United Way
Jo Anne Bander, President / CEO, Donors Forum
Ira Clark, Health Trust
Hilda M. Fernandez, Executive Director, Miami-Dade Homeless Trust
Modesto E. Abety, Executive Director, Miami-Dade Children's Services Council

211 / Information and Referral (I&R) Service Providers

*Maria K. Cypen, Executive Director, Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.
*Thamara Labrousse, Director of Helpline Services, Switchboard of Miami, Inc.
*Yvonne Sawyer, program Director, Family and Children Faith Coalition
*Richard Siclari, Executive Director, Community Care Resource
*Christine Stroy-Martin, Executive Director, Community Case Management, Inc.
*Sam Walthour, Team Metro (Ana Molina, I&R Coordinator, and Michael Anderson, Administrative Division Director)
*Freadda Zeigler, Alliance for Aging, Inc.
Ed Rosasco, Greater Miami Alzheimer's
Charles Lanza, Miami-Dade Emergency Operations Center
Cheryl Johnson, The Harvest is Plenty Ministry
Rev. Ernest Andrew, Goulds Coalition of Ministers
Christi Trieber, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue
Susan Windmiller, Miami-Dade Police Department

Providers

*Ophelia Brown-Lawson, Executive Director, Miami-Dade Community Action Agency
*Dr. Mark Gross, Family Central, Inc. (Maria E. León, Early Care and Education Manager, Special Projects)
*Daniella Levine, Executive Director, Human Services Coalition (by phone)
* Eileen Maloney-Simon, Executive Director, YWCA of Greater Miami
*Rosa E. Pizzi, Executive Director, Abriendo Puertas, Inc.
Andre Wallace, Empowerment Trust
Charles Brown, One-Stop Director, Jobs for Miami
Olga Connor, Miami-Dade Health Department
Leonie Hermantin, Haitian Neighborhood Center
Lydia Muniz, Big Brothers / Big Sisters
Phillip Klees, Family Counseling Service

System Planners / Needs Assessments

*Mary Donworth, United Way of Miami-Dade
*Judy Farber, Deputy Division Director, Department of Children and Families, District 11
*Max B. Rothman, Executive Director, FIU Center on Aging
Judy Zito, Miami-Dade County E-Gov
Bryan Finnie, Miami-Dade Empowerment Trust, Inc. / OECD
Diane O'Quinn Williams, Director, Miami-Dade Planning Department