

KH Consulting Independent Report on County's Contracted Information & Referral (I&R) Service Program

Summary of Findings & Recommendations

Prepared by 211 LA, July 2022

I. KH Consulting Project Description

Los Angeles County's Chief Executive Office contracted KH Consulting in December of 2018 to conduct an evaluation of the county's current I&R services and provide recommendations and a business plan for improving the county's I&R service delivery model. The project as contracted included three phases, each with its own report.

The reports were delivered between March 2019 and February 2020 and were not released publicly prior to 211 LA's Public Records Act Request in June 2022, despite being cited by the CEO's office as an input to the Request for Proposals issued in February 2021 for a new scope of work for countywide Information & Referrals services using the 2-1-1 dialing code.

Report Phases:

- A. **Phase 1 - Independent Evaluation of Countywide Information & Referral (I&R) Services** (Final Report March 2019), providing an independent assessment of 211 LA's programmatic efficiency, quality, cost effectiveness, and value to the county
- B. **Phase 2 - Best Practice Considerations for an Enhanced Countywide Information & Referral System** (Final Report December 2019), providing a review of prevailing and best I&R practices in North America, county input on desired future direction of I&R services, and development of an recommended I&R model
- C. **Phase 3 - Business Plan for Building an Information, Referral, & Connection (IR&C) Service Delivery Model** (Final Report February 2020), providing actions plans for implementing the recommended service model

II. Phase 1 Report - 211 LA I&R Services Evaluation

The Phase 1 report evaluating 211 LA's I&R service delivery included the following key findings and recommendations:

- A. ***The 211 LA caller population is highly vulnerable and dependent on 211 services***, is predominantly female and minority (80% each), is aging (over 25% are over age 56), and many lack their own residences or are homeless, are chronically unemployed, and have disabilities (25%)
(KH Phase 1 Report, pgs 25, 28, 30, 32)

- B. **The County will need to balance the need for live phone and voice support for aging populations in addition to tech-savvy younger populations that may prefer online methods**
(KH Phase 1 Report, pg 29)
- C. **More people in LA County are in need of and would use the 211 service if there were a higher level of awareness**
(KH Phase 1 Report, pg 39, 41)
- D. **Callers who reach 211 LA CRAs are highly satisfied with the service offered**
 - 1. “There is a consistent pattern during the past 30 months of callers who speak to a CRA being satisfied with 211 LA services, as well as the CRAs’ skills in being compassionate and knowledgeable about services and referrals. Data from a randomized follow-up protocol revealed satisfaction levels in excess of 90%.” (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 41)
 - 2. “CRAs provide high levels of caller satisfaction. Any changes to protocols designed to address the length of the call must be assessed in terms of the impact on satisfaction, remembering that many callers are facing difficult hardships and at times have desperate needs – for food, shelter, and other resources.” (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 68)
 - 3. *Caller Satisfaction Data Table 5.3 below (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 42)*

Table 5.3: Caller Satisfaction

Caller Satisfaction Factors	FY 2016-2017		FY 2017-2018		7/2018 – 12/2018	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Callers Surveyed	14,842	--	12,088	--	6,979	--
Satisfied with 211 LA	13,784	93%	12,088	93%	6,979	92%
CRA knowledgeable	13,784	96%	11,217	96%	6,438	95%
CRA Cared	13,781	98%	11,206	98%	6,437	98%
Would call 211 LA again	13,454	97%	10,534	96%	6,044	96%

- E. **211 LA is cost-effective and efficiently manages its indirect costs, but the contract base has been underfunded, resulting in tradeoffs. “The County has to decide what strategic balance it wants among call volumes, quality, and cost for baseline I&R services.” (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 80).**
 - 1. “The County contract base amount has been more than \$2 million below what the amount might have been each year if the CPI had been applied to the 2005 contract base. This difference totals \$11.9 million for the last 5 years.” (years cited are 2013 - 2017) (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 72)
 - 2. “211 LA is managing its indirect costs tightly, but some of the changes have reduced call volumes, despite the need in Los Angeles County.” (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 49).
 - 3. “When call volumes increase with a flat revenue agreement, 211 LA has fewer options in addressing and balancing those needs. The results of 211 LA’s tradeoffs in response to County funding levels are clear. Although it is likely that many residents

in need are not calling 211 LA, those callers who do speak with a CRA get high levels of service, but have to wait longer than the County standards call for.” (KH Phase 1 Report, pg 74)

F. The County’s 211 contracted services are among the most comprehensive services in the nation. Both the County and 211 LA users benefit when callers in need reach out to 211 LA. *“Most importantly, the County’s contracted information and referral system offers needed support to the most vulnerable populations in the County. Being able to reach a compassionate voice in a time of significant need is a reassuring element of a caring service. When residents are not aware of 211 services, or are not provided sufficiently rapid responses to their calls, they either go without needed help or call:*

1. County departments that may not be staffed to address emergency or off hours requests
2. Inappropriate departments who are not responsible for providing the services needed
3. Offices of elected officials, who are not staffed to handle emergency requests
4. 911

These calls can result in diverting resources that are needed for other purposes, often at a greater expense, and provide less-effective I&R services to the residents.” (KH Phase 1 Report, pgs 88-89, includes Benefits table below)

Benefits Identified by County Departments

The departments involved in KH Focus Group discussions identified significant benefits to the County of the 211 LA health and human services hotline. The benefits cited included:

24/7 one-stop shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A one-stop shop for services that may be offered through multiple County departments ■ Capacity to refer callers to both County and nonprofit services ■ 24/7 operation
211 LA staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Caring people for County residents to speak with over the phone ■ Informed CRAs – “they know more about all County departments’ offerings than most County employees” ■ 211 LA staff who are trained and supported to be able to work with callers who are facing extremely stressful challenges, uniquely positioning them to respond to needs in emergencies
Cost-effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cost-effective operations – cited as a significant cost-savings as compared with using County phone contacts
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ TDD and language facility not widely available across the County ■ Structure for communication during emergencies – both personal (domestic violence) and county-wide (fire, earthquake, etc.) ■ Calls that are recorded, which has been helpful in defending lawsuits
Database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A well-managed database and taxonomy allowing broad referrals

III. Phase 2 Report - Recommendations for Improving the County's I&R Delivery Model

The Phase 2 Report surveyed 14 Information and Referral (I&R) vendors and 6 contract administrators across North America, conducted follow up calls and a site visit to 211 San Diego, and received input from county departments and the office of the CIO (it did not include CBOs or 211 users). The report identified needed improvements and proposed an "optimal I&R service model" and recommendations for the county's consideration.

Key findings and recommendations include:

- A. **Preserve identified strengths of current I&R services (provided by 211 LA), including responsiveness and quality, service provision, and database.**
 - 1. *"It will be important to build on these strengths going forward. The County's current I&R Vendor has set a high standard of 24/7 provision of service with multi-lingual capability. The CRAs are widely perceived as knowledgeable about all County services and are compassionate and caring to the callers. These features must remain central to any expansion of 211 or other I&R services."* (KH Phase 2 Report, pg 14)
- B. **211 San Diego's Community Information Exchange as a model for best practices that LA County should seek to emulate**
 - 1. 211 San Diego's service model includes a network of community partners participating in referrals and data sharing, assessment, assignment of risk factors, and follow up by 211 San Diego staff, funding from multiple partners, and a shared system (KH Phase 2 Report, pgs 19-22)
- C. **Proposal of an I&R Maturity Model with 5 levels, with the intent to move LA County's I&R service from Level 2 & 3 (as assessed in 2018) to Level 5, in phases (See entire I&R Maturity Model in KH Phase 2 Report, pg 32)**

Level 1: Aware	Level 2: Reactive	Level 3: Proactive	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Innovative/Optimized
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- 1. *Note: Since the report was written, 211 LA has made many of the improvements recommended, and moved the entirety of its Process & Technology segment to Level 4, Managed I&R.*
- D. **Provision of the following recommendations:**
 - 1. **"Invest in the 211 LA County website capability so that it can reach more residents - through promotion, self-search ability, and multiple languages."** (KH Report Phase 2, pg 7)
Note: 211 LA already accomplished this with its 2020 website launch, and now serves over 1 million users/year with enhanced self-search ability and multiple languages
 - 2. **"The County and 211 LA should implement multiple modalities for clients accessing the integrated I&R data base"** (KH Report Phase 2, pg 7-8)
Note: 211 LA implemented online chat, text, and email service since the report, serving over 40,000 requests via these channels in 2021. The report also recommends a smart phone app which was not included in the RFP but was proposed by 211 LA

3. **“The County should improve its ability to ensure that those individuals in need reach support organizations and receive needed services”** (including through expanded triage and services for people in crisis including homelessness, securing access to services through warm handoff, case management, real time service availability information, and service gap analysis) *(KH Phase 2 Report, pg 8)*
Note: 211 LA supports all of these initiatives but not the way in which they are handled in the RFP
4. **“The County’s Chief Executive Office’s Office of Chief Information Officer (CEO-OCIO) should maintain a robust, secure, updatable, integrated, and widely accessible County data base, thereby including both County and non-County data on human-, health-, and social service information in support of this effort.** *(KH Phase 2 Report, pg 9)*
Note: this recommendation was not included in the RFP and does not cite maintaining AIRS database standards. Not recommended by 211 LA.
5. **The County should coordinate a regular assessment of social and health service program outreach and “hotline” initiatives to evaluate whether and how to integrate or coordinate them with the overall I&R system.** *(KH Phase 2 Report, pg 10)*
6. **The County should diversify its funding sources** (including with foundations, nonprofits, corporations, and other governmental agencies) *(KH Phase 2 Report, pg 10)*
7. **The County should apply its Performance-Based Outcomes funding model with payments for I&R base services, coupled with incentive payments linked to client satisfaction and service volumes.** *(KH Phase 2 Report, pg 10)*
8. **The County should ensure that the I&R services are marketed effectively** *(KH Phase 2 Report, pgs 10-11)*
9. **The County can use I&R metrics to understand client needs better and potential resource allocation requirements** *(KH Phase 2 Report, pg 11)*

IV. Phase 3 Report - Business Plan for Implementing Recommendations

The Phase 3 Report built upon the Phase 2 recommendations and expanded input from County departments to develop guiding principles and action plans for implementation. In this phase the focus shifted significantly from the comprehensive I&R services provided by 211 LA to the county’s overall I&R ecosystem of services, seeking an integrated model and platform that would be rolled out in phases, by multiple participants and vendors.

Key elements of the plan include:

- A. **The county should develop a vision for an enhanced countywide Information, Referral, and Connection (IR&C) system**, and use the Guiding Principles developed by participating county staff to build a trustworthy system.
 1. “Optimized IR&C Model” will provide new opportunities including “Large volumes of completely new data elements available to support County departments and clients are integrated into a database that is accessible through multiple channels” and should start with “Widespread buy-in to IR&C vision & strategy, clear accountability

for IR&C strategy/change initiatives, and shared understanding of how IR&C performance will be sustained and improved”. (KH Report Phase 3, pgs 11-14)

B. **Recommends “phased requirements to expand on current phone based I&R” and use of multiple contracts or sub-contracts to handle system transition complexity:**

“There are likely to be multiple contracts or sub-contracts for the IR&C system. It is conceivable that there will be separate functionality and requirements for:

1. “Human interactions through phone-based 24/7/365 support provided by CRAs”
2. “Web design and interfaces that include people-friendly, culturally competent features”
3. “Artificial intelligence and other analytic capacity”
4. “Platform management”

(Phase 3 report pg 44)

Note: The RFP released tried to combine all of these things into one contract, and then prioritized the scoring of the AI and platform management components to the detriment of the human interactions, despite KH report citing multiple times that “access by phone remains - and likely for the foreseeable future will remain - one of the primary means to access IR&C services” (Phase 3 report pg 47).

An approach that would allow for prioritizing the quality of the live service as recommended by KH would be to issue separate RFPs for these different components, or to work in partnership with the selected 2-1-1 service provider to subsequently achieve integration goals without interrupting 2-1-1 service.

C. **RFP solicitation should include “selection criteria that will include track records, diversity of experience, and cultural competence across a variety of populations”.**

(KH Phase 3 Report, pg 44)

Note: RFP did not include these criteria, which are critical to successful delivery of 2-1-1 service to the LA County population.