

# **211 SERVICE FOR THE NIAGARA REGION**

## **BUSINESS PLAN OVERVIEW**

This Business Plan, compiled by the 211 Niagara Steering Committee, provides a plan for the implementation of the **211** service for the Niagara Region. The service, to be known as **211 Niagara**, will enhance the existing Information and Referral (I&R) services presently offered by *Information Niagara*. All Niagara residents will be able to access this improved system through one, three-digit telephone number: “**211**”. This option will more effectively and efficiently assist the caller to access community, social, health and government services they may require.

In August 2002, a feasibility study that investigated the requirements and implications of providing a **211** service to the Niagara Region was completed. This study identified *Information Niagara* as the organization to facilitate the implementation of **211**. In October 2002, the Regional Municipality of Niagara endorsed *Information Niagara* as the service provider of **211 Niagara**.

The current 211 Niagara Steering Committee includes representatives from:

- *Information Niagara*
- United Way Niagara Falls (representing the four Niagara Region United Ways)
- Niagara Regional Police Services
- Distress Centre of Niagara

### **Service Implementation**

The goal to launch **211 Niagara** is scheduled for January 2005. It is expected that the system set-up and testing, new staff recruitment and training, office renovations and other activities will begin during the eight-month period leading up to the public launch of the service.

### **211 Background**

In August 2001, in response to an application submitted by the United Way and other agencies, the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) designated the three-digit dialing code 211 (two-one-one) for use in providing information and referral to community, social, health and government services across Canada.

## North American 211 Status

Toronto is the first city in Canada to provide a 211 community information and referral service. Since its launch in June 2002, 211 Toronto (operated by Community Information Toronto) has answered over 500,000 calls. After moving from ten-digit to three-digit dialing they experienced more than a three-fold increase in calls. In the United States, the 211 service is currently operational in over 25 States. Dozens of other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States are currently planning to implement the 211 service.

## Benefits of 211

Single-point access serves to strengthen the outreach offered in a community by efficiently and accurately linking people to the resources available to help them and also allows agencies to focus on their core services. The benefits of 211 are summarized in the table below.

Benefits of 211		
Individuals	Agencies	Community
Eliminates Confusion	Improves Access	Improves Responsiveness
Reduces Search Abandonment	Enhances Core Service Offerings	Expands Civic Involvement
Streamlines Access	Improves Agency Network	Reduces Social Costs

## Scope of Existing Systems

The existing systems of community information and referral services in the Niagara region has limitations:

- Numerous access points creating confusion for residents
- Lack of awareness of services
- Difficulty of recall of 10-digit phone numbers
- Concentration of services in urban centres

## Management and Organization

*Information Niagara* will manage and implement all operational aspects of delivering 211 to the Niagara region. The organization is a non-profit, charitable organization, governed by a volunteer board of directors.

## Service Delivery

Users will be able to access **211 Niagara** by telephone, in person, via the internet and through printed materials.

- **211 Niagara** will enhance existing comprehensive information and referral services and more effectively and efficiently connect all Niagara residents with the community, social, health and government services they require.
- **211 Niagara** will serve individuals placing information and referral calls within the Niagara region's telephone exchange boundary and agencies offering community, social, health or government services to the residents of the Niagara Region.
- **211 Niagara** will be available free-of-charge to callers from within the Niagara region (exception: those calls placed from payphones or cellular telephones).
- **211 Niagara's** primary focus will be to provide above-average quality person-to-person telephone information and referral service. Operating hours will become 24-hours 7-days (24/7) a week coverage by 2006. Internet access to the *Information Niagara* database will continue to be available for self-referral to agency programs and services.
- **211 Niagara** will continue to collaborate and cooperate with other community and specialized information and referral providers serving the Niagara Region to facilitate the effective integration and promotion of 211.
- **211 Niagara** will maintain a comprehensive database of detailed and up-to-date information on community services and programs through *Information Niagara*.
- **211 Niagara** will use an Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system to track each call.
- **211 Niagara** will initially have four Certified Information & Referral Specialists (CIRS) and one Certified Resource Specialist (CRS). *Information Niagara* plans to start the process for InformOntario accreditation in Spring 2004 and Alliance of Information and Referral Services (AIRS) accreditation in August 2004.
- **211 Niagara** will utilize the brand image developed by InformCanada.
- **211 Niagara** will market the 211 service (according to the plan developed by their Marketing and Communications' Task Group in October 2003) to all residents within the Niagara Region.

## **211 Niagara Call Projections**

The U.S. experienced a minimum 40% increase in calls within the first year of service. **211** Toronto experienced a 176% increase in calls in the first year. With

aggressive marketing strategies, **211 Niagara** anticipates call volumes to triple within the first two years following the implementation of 211.

## **Human Resources**

Once **211 Niagara** is operational, *Information Niagara* will require additional staff to meet the increase in call volumes and operational hours. *Information Niagara* presently operates with 7.5 full-time equivalents (FTE). This will increase to 10.3 FTE in 2005 and 12.4 FTE by 2006.

## **Technology and Infrastructure**

*Information Niagara's* existing telephone system cannot support the CRTC requirements for 211 delivery and must be substantially upgraded or replaced. Three additional workstations will be required by 2006 to accommodate staffing requirements. Although total floor space available is fully built-out, office space will be reconfigured to accommodate additional staff to a maximum of six call centre workstations.

## **Financial Plan**

Start-up costs are estimated at \$60,000 (all figures in real 2003 dollars). Start-up costs include:

- staff salaries and employment benefits
- new staff recruiting and training
- consulting fees for accreditation
- office renovations, new equipment and supplies
- purchase and support of new telecommunications equipment
- and marketing and public awareness activities

First year (2005) operating costs are estimated at \$476,000. Operating costs are estimated to reach \$556,000 in 2006. Operating costs are based on the additional expenses (for salaries, benefits, training and additional office equipment and supplies) required to meet the projected call volumes and CRTC standards.

## 211 Niagara Start-up and Operating Costs

Service	Information Niagara	211 Operating Costs			
		Start Up	2004 50hrs/5days	2005 70hrs/7days	2006 70hrs/7days
Year Hours of Operation	2003 40hrs/5days				
Estimated Volumes	29,000		35,000	50,000	75,000
FTE Staff	7.5		7.9	10.3	12.4
Cost per call	10.78		10.82	9.52	7.41
<b>Salaries and Benefits</b>	231,723		280,700	351,550	433,075
<b>Technology</b>	7,000	20,000	5,450	6,000	5,000
<b>Telecommunications</b>	19,676	7,000	22,475	24,000	26,000
<b>Occupancy and Facilities</b>	23,518	7,500	24,100	24,200	26,800
<b>Office Expenses</b>	13,825	12,000	14,000	14,000	15,000
<b>Consulting Fees</b>	1,600	7,500	5,625	5,625	5,625
<b>Public Education</b>	2,000	3,000	10,000	30,000	20,000
<b>Recruitment &amp; Training</b>	4,500	3,000	2,900	3,000	3,000
<b>Interpreting Expenses</b>	0	0	3,750	5,625	7,500
<b>Administration</b>	8,950	0	10,000	12,000	14,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$312,795</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>	<b>\$379,000</b>	<b>\$476,000</b>	<b>\$556,000</b>

### Funding Resources

Current funding of *Information Niagara's* I&R line is provided by four area United Ways and *Information Niagara's* productive enterprise, gaming and special projects. It is assumed that *Information Niagara* will continue to receive ongoing funding from its current funders for **211 Niagara**.

The capacity to operate **211 Niagara** is dependent on the ability to secure adequate sustained funding. This business plan assumes that *Information Niagara's* existing funding base remains secure and that the primary sources of new funding will come from:

- Enhanced United Way Core funding
- Regional and Provincial Government
- *Information Niagara's* productive enterprises
- Community Foundations

### Preliminary 2004 Fundraising Budget

Preliminary Fundraising Budget	2004		2005	2006
	Start Up	Operating	Operating	Operating
<b>Start-Up &amp; operating Costs</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>	<b>\$379,000</b>	<b>\$476,000</b>	<b>\$556,000</b>
Area United Ways		95,000	118,000	135,000
Regional Government		50,000	60,000	135,000
Provincial Government		50,000	115,000	135,000
Productive Enterprise		100,000	100,000	100,000
Gaming		25,000	25,000	25,000
Grants – Foundations	60,000	59,000	58,000	26,000
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>	<b>\$379,000</b>	<b>\$476,000</b>	<b>\$556,000</b>

### Study Issues and Limitations

Every reasonable effort has been made to access and accurately assess all necessary information for this business plan. However, some issues could be re-evaluated if key determinants are altered as additional new information becomes available. Call volumes and operating hours are key determinants of this plan.

### Conclusion

The easy-to-recall, highly visible **211** telephone number, will enhance access to information about community, social, health and government services. **211 Niagara** has the potential to improve well-being and reduce unnecessary delays and frustration in accessing service.

**211** Niagara will be successful as it is building on the 30 year track record of Information Niagara:

- Compiling the human services database
- Establishing classification systems
- Providing service to the public
- Extensive networks of community contacts cultivated
- Ability to attain the standards defined by CRTC and InformCanada