**Cecile Erwin Young, Executive Commissioner**

**Request for Applications (RFA)**
**for**
**2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral Network Operations**
**RFA No. HHS0009792**

**Exhibit U, TIRN Quality Standards & Definitions Guide**

# Texas Information & Referral Network (TIRN) Quality-Standards & Definitions Guide

Expectations and Objectives for Call Monitoring

**November 2016**

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# Call Monitoring Overview

## Introduction

The Quality-Standards & Definitions Guide serves as a comprehensive reference for operationalizing components of the TIRN Quality Monitoring (QM) form. The ultimate goal of the Quality-Standards & Definitions Guide is to provide clear expectations for quality in information and referral service (I&R) delivery for TIRN contractors, promote consistency across the Network, and ensure fidelity and objectivity across the scoring process.

The development of the quality-monitoring tool is described, along with an explanation of the process and procedures for carrying out quality assurance monitoring. Additionally, definitions of the various quality indicators are included along with examples of key phrases or behaviors to watch for in the contact-monitoring process. While TIRN presents these core expectations for I&R quality, 2-1-1 Area Information Centers (AICs) are welcome to assess for additional quality measures beyond the items included here.

Finally, the development of this guide and the attached quality monitoring tool have been informed by the TIRN *Plan of Operations* and *AIRS Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral, Version 8.0.*

## Assessment Tool Design Process

The attached QM form was developed and validated through the following process:

1. **Review of QM forms across the Network**
    a. Identification of common versus unique indicators
    b. Common indicators: Those that appear on every QM form across the Network
    c. Unique indicators: Those that appear on a few, some, but not many QM forms across the Network
2. **SOS Workgroup Focus Group**
    a. Workgroup scored the common and unique indicators based on a scale of low-medium-high importance to delivering an I&R call
    b. Scoring was inventoried and each element discussed, including key phrases to operationalize the component
    c. Feedback from the focus group on key phrases has helped inform and operationalize the Quality-Standards & Definitions Guide
3. **TAIRS Focus Group**
    a. Common indicators identified and focus group asked to vote for top four most important
        i. Objective: Assessing feedback on weighting common indicators
    b. Unique indicators identified and focus group asked to vote for only the most important

i. Objective: Identifying additional indicators for inclusion on a TIRN QM form

**4. Additional Considerations**

a. Attached QM form & weighting informed by TIRN contract deliverables on I&R quality. Each criterion is assigned a numeric value, and criterion specifically called out in the contract *Plan of Operations* are weighted heavier.

b. Attached QM form informed by AIRS Standards and Quality Indicators (AIRS, v. 8, Standard 1) and TIRN practice experience

**5. STEAR**

a. Pending section for criterion related to STEAR transfers and STEAR registries

b. Scripts developed by the SOS Workgroup will be rolled out which will provide quality indicators for STEAR transfer calls

c. Once rolled out, SOS scripts will be used as a framework for any new additions/scoring/etc. to this section

## Monitoring Best Practices

**Reserved for future use.**

# Methodology

## Process

1. Using the HHSC/TIRN provided QM form, Contractor must periodically monitor recorded and active calls, and if applicable, written transcriptions of web chat and text inquiries, for all I&R Contact Specialists and provide feedback on the quality of service delivery.
2. Monitoring must be conducted by an I&R Contact Specialist's supervisor (e.g. Director, Contact Center Manager, Lead I&R Specialist, and/or Supervisor).
3. Should monitoring identify any concerns or issues (e.g. agent-specific concern), coaching/feedback should be provided in accordance with the Contractor's Quality Assurance Plan.
4. An average quality assessment score of 80% or more should be met for interactions sampled during the reporting period.
5. Outcomes will be measured by submitted documentation of quality monitoring activities and results as a part of quarterly reporting.

## Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

1. Standard information and referral interactions only
2. No STEAR related transfers or interactions included in quality assurance monitoring, research purposes only
3. No outbound follow-up calls
4. Interactions must be longer than one minute in duration

# Quality Monitoring Indicators

## Contact Details

1. Date/Time: Record the date and time the call took place.
2. Contact Type: Record the call type (e.g. referral, information, transfer, advocacy). This is information is reflected in the contact report generated through the customer relationship management (CRM) system.
3. Length of contact: Record the contact duration as reflected in the Verint call recording software or CRM system.
4. Specialist Name/ID & AIC: Provide the agent ID, name, and AIC of the recorded call. This will assist AIC management staff who may request a copy of the QM form for training and coaching purposes.
5. Contact Record ID: Document the Contact ID. This information is reflected in the call data section of the recorded call on Verint.
6. Special Projects: Indicate whether the AIC has an active, approved Special Project. Depending on the Special Project, this may impact the calls, call content, and call duration. AIC's must have prior TIRN approval before engaging in a Special Project.

## Contact/Greeting

| Quality Indicator | Definition | Purpose | Key Phrases or Behavior Examples | Additional Considerations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** Uses standard greeting | - Identifies agency name<br>- Specialist provides their name/pseudonym | - Clearly identifies who inquirer has reached | "Thank you for calling 2-1-1 Texas, [AIC/Agency Name]. This is _. How may I help you?" | - If a specialist uses a pseudonym, they should |

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| | - Specialist provides an offer to help | - Establishes rapport and connection<br>- Specialist demonstrates that they are interested in providing assistance | "2-1-1 Texas, [AIC/Agency Name], this is _. How may I help you?" | maintain consistency with the name provided |
| **2.**<br>Offers brief description of 2-1-1 services for first time inquirers/thanks repeat inquirers for contacting 2-1-1 again | - If an inquirer asks or appears unsure, or if it is an inquirer's first time contacting 2-1-1, specialist provides a brief explanation of 2-1-1 I&R services: Free, 24/7 service to connect individuals to community resources | - Educates first time inquirers<br><br>- Sets expectations about the role of I&R (link and navigate, not case management or the resource itself)<br><br>- Thanks inquirer for contacting 2-1-1 again, which helps build rapport and conveys to inquirer that specialist is glad they reached out | "2-1-1 is a 24 hour service that connects Texans to community resources."<br><br>"2-1-1 is a 24/7 hotline that links Texans to community resources."<br><br>"2-1-1 is a 24/7 hotline that connects you to resources in your community."<br><br>"We're glad you called us again." | - Item should not be scored N/A, as Specialist should demonstrate effort to ask if it is an inquirer's first time contacting 2-1-1 or thank the inquirer for contacting 2-1-1 again |
| **3.**<br>Educates caller on difference between Opt. 1 and Opt. 2 (when applicable) | - If caller asks or appears unsure, specialist should briefly explain the difference between the various 2-1-1 options:<br><br>- Option 1 is for services in their area (rent, utility, prescription assistance, etc.)<br>- Option 2 is for State Benefits programs (SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, CHIP) | - Empowers and helps callers to better understand and navigate the 2-1-1 IVR system | "It sounds like you're looking for help with your [SNAP/Medicaid/TANF/CHIP] benefits. You did dial the right number, but actually reached Option 1. We connect people to community resources. Option 2 is for benefit programs like SNAP, Medicaid, or TANF. I would be happy to transfer you." | - Item scored N/A if it is evident caller has clear understanding of who they are speaking with (e.g. called before, states understanding and familiarity as may be the case with service providers, caller |

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| | - Option 3 is for reporting fraud, waste, or abuse of State Benefits<br>- Options 4 is for help leaving home during disaster<br>- Options 8 is for mental health or substance abuse issues<br>- Typically, a caller will only need to know the difference between Option 1 and Option 2 | | "You dialed the right number, but you actually reached Option 1 at this line. Option 2 is for State benefits like SNAP or Medicaid. If you would like, I would be happy to transfer you." | expresses wish to not hear the difference, or does not allow specialist to explain--hangs-up, does not have time), call is not Opt. 2 related. |

## Assessment/Clarification

| Quality Indicator | Definition | Purpose | Key Phrases or Behavior Examples | Additional Considerations |
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| **4.**<br>Asks effective questions to identify inquirer's need/reason for inquiry, explaining need for certain questions | - Specialist should ask pertinent questions to assist in identifying and clarifying the inquirer's need and determining an accurate referral. These include questions that seek to understand the origin of the issue, what steps the inquirer has taken to address the problem thus far, clarifying questions to verify service area, and questions that elicit details on the nature of the problem or resources | - Transitions conversation from opening rapport to assessment of inquirer's reason for contact 2-1-1<br>- Helps specialist make an accurate assessment of the inquirer's situation<br>- Assists in identifying most appropriate referrals for addressing the inquirer's concerns | "Do you have transportation to get to _ agency?"<br>"You need help paying your rent. May I ask when it is due?"<br>"Are you looking for a food pantry that is open on a particular day?"<br>"Just so I understand…" | - Item scored N/A if inquirer asks directly for an agency's contact info (i.e. information call), or caller requests Opt 2 transfer<br>- Item scored "No" if evident other relevant questions need to be asked and specialist only |

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| | available (e.g. Is the issue time sensitive? Has the inquirer already spoken with a particular agency before? Does the inquirer have any mobility or transportation concerns that will help in determining an appropriate referral? What potential resources does the inquirer have that may help in meeting the stated need? What barriers exist that prevent the inquirer from meeting the stated need?) | - May identify additional, potentially unstated needs<br><br>- On occasion, may queue specialist to explore the inquirer's resources when community resources are unavailable<br><br>- Used to prepare inquirer for further probing questions | "What do you know about _ resources in your community?"<br><br>"To help me search for resources…"<br><br>- Asks open-ended questions<br><br>"There are a few different places that may handle that so can you tell me a little more…" | requested demographic information<br><br>- Specialist should pay attention to the inquirer's cues and be mindful not to overwhelm the inquirer with clarifying questions, explaining need for certain questions |
| **5.** Records inquirer's zip code, age, gender, military status, 1st time caller status (if provided) | - Specialist should request inquirer's demographic info<br><br>- If inquirer asks why the info is being requested, specialist should explain reason or need for demographic questions and that information remains confidential<br><br>- When needed, specialist should affirm inquirer's right to refuse information and that refusal in no way prohibits access to I&R services, although it may | Demographic info:<br>- Informs community reporting<br>- Maps trends in unmet needs<br>- Identifies areas for increased outreach efforts<br>- Assists specialists garnering "enough information about inquirers to help them address and/or resolve their problems (AIRS Standards, 8.0)" | "I am happy to help you. Before we get started, do you mind if I get some information from you first?"<br><br>"To look for resources in your area, may I have your zip code?"<br><br>"You do not have to provide this information; however, I do want to let you know that I cannot guarantee the agencies will be able to serve your region without your zip code." | - Item scored N/A if the inquirer refused to provide their information<br><br>- Demographic info requested during the contact should be logged accurately in iCarol<br><br>- As is already the practice, specialists can |

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| | hinder ability to locate most appropriate referral<br><br>- Should inquirer refuse to provide information, use "00000" for logging zip code | | "Your information is strictly confidential."<br><br>"I understand your refusal; however without information I may not be able to locate appropriate resources."<br><br>"Is this your first time contacting 2-1-1?" | infer caller's gender<br><br>- Specialists will be scored on whether they followed procedure in asking for demographic information as a whole, not on each individual piece of demographic information<br><br>- Only zip code is needed on Opt 2 transfer calls |
| **6.**<br>Probes gently (if applicable) | - Specialist responds to cues from inquirer to determine if additional help may be needed, exploring further the inquirer's problem and resources<br><br>- Uses minimal encouragers | - Identifies potentially underlying need or unstated problem<br><br>- Helps specialist dig deeper to understand the inquirer's situation<br><br>- Demonstrates that the specialist is interested in fully understanding the inquirer's reason for contacting 2-1-1 | "Do you have a difficult time keeping food in the house?"<br><br>"Could you share what is going on that you cannot pay your rent?"<br><br>"Have you had trouble getting to your doctor's appointment before?"<br><br>"Could you tell me more about…" | - Item scored N/A on straightforward information contacts and it is clear additional probing is not needed<br><br>- Probing should be done gently and should stop once it becomes clear that the |

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| | | | | inquirer does not want to go on any further |
| **7.** Inquirer's concerns/requests are clearly acknowledged (reflecting, clarifying, summarizing) | - Specialist paraphrases inquirer's concerns to confirm understanding<br><br>- Offers reflective statements that convey empathy<br><br>- Tone of voice empathetic, and congruent to inquirer's situation<br><br>- Affirms/Validates inquirer's feelings (when appropriate)<br><br>- Can be in the form of a question or statement<br><br>- Inquirer should not be asked to repeat information unnecessarily | - Demonstrates to inquirer that specialist is listening<br><br>- Ensures specialist understands inquirer's situation<br><br>- Provides specialist with information necessary to perform accurate referral search<br><br>- Helps aid memory<br><br>- Validates inquirer's experience and builds rapport | "That seems like a lot on your plate…"<br><br>"You have tried a lot of places already. Let me look for other resources that help with utilities that you might not have known about. How does that sound?"<br><br>"Let me make sure I understood you correctly…"<br><br>"So you are looking for information on subsidized childcare?"<br><br>"I can see how that would make you feel…"<br><br>"So, you think you are ready to apply for financial assistance and then look for somewhere else to live?"<br><br>"I would be glad to look up some places that provide free car seats." | - Although it is encouraged for the specialist to confirm they understand the inquirer's need and request, this item scored N/A on straightforward information contacts |
| **8.** Assists inquirer to | - Encourages inquirer who appears overwhelmed by multiple and cumulative | - Helps to redirect inquirer to more digestible, and | "What is your most important need *today*?" | - Item scored N/A if inquirer's request is clear, |

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| identify problem and prioritize needs | needs: encourages inquirer to focus on most pressing need for that day<br><br>- Redirects or guides inquirer to most pressing need for that time<br><br>- Keeps inquirer on track and focused | manageable problem-solving approaches<br><br>- Prioritizes helping process<br><br>- Creates a buffer for the specialist in cases of chronic inquirers<br><br>- Maintains mindfulness around contact volume and productivity | "It sounds like you have a lot going on. I am glad you reached out. Which need you like to start with today?"<br><br>"Which bill would you like to focus on first?"<br><br>- Refers to short-term case management resources, as appropriate | and need to prioritize is unnecessary (as in cases on information inquiries, or single need inquiries)<br><br>- Contact management techniques such as focusing and redirecting, should always be performed in a respectful and professional manner |
| **9.** Identifies and assesses additional needs (if applicable) | - If the inquirer's statements or the assessment of the inquirer's situation reveal additional needs, specialist should make an attempt to clarify, assess, and offer referrals to meet those needs. | - Inquirer may not have known to ask and/or did not know how to ask about these additional needs, or that resources for those needs were available<br><br>- Ensures comprehensive assessment of inquirer's situation<br><br>- Demonstrates to inquirer that the specialist is truly engaged and interested in assisting them | "I am so sorry to hear about your loss…You mentioned needing help with burial costs. We also have resources for bereavement support if that sounds like something you would be interested in during this time."<br><br>"You called about prescription assistance for your diabetes. I wonder, would you be interested in any diabetes management | - Item scored N/A if no additional needs are revealed |

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| | | | classes if I can find some in the database?”<br><br>“I know you are waiting to apply for Medicaid, but in the meantime, would you like me to find any free or low-cost clinics where you can see a doctor now?”<br><br>“I am happy to transfer you to Opt 2 to talk to someone about your SNAP case, but before I do, would you like information about food pantries or places that offer food vouchers in your area?”<br><br>“Would you like some information on shelters in case you are not able to find rental assistance?” | |
| **10.** Screened for crisis or disaster intervention and followed appropriate protocol (when applicable) | Appropriately identifies characteristics of a crisis inquiry:<br>- Inquirer appears more in need of venting the problem than finding resources to help<br>- Inquirer involves specialist providing more crisis intervention than I&R<br>- Inquirer describes experiencing strong | - Identifies the characteristics of a crisis inquiry<br>- Ensures specialist understand the role of I&R in the event of a crisis<br>- Understands the protocols for lethality assessments and protective measures | "Are you thinking about suicide?"<br><br>"Are you safe right now?"<br><br>"Are you hurt?"<br><br>"Are you thinking about killing yourself?"<br><br>"May I have your name and phone number in case we get disconnected?" | - Item scored N/A if it is evident that inquirer is not in crisis and intervention not needed |

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| | feelings of hopelessness or a loss of control<br>- Inquirer uses phrases such as "I can't take it anymore," "suicide," or talks about being a burden to others<br>- Inquirer is extremely emotional, focusing more on their feelings than the facts of the problem<br>- This includes assistance for individuals threatening homicide, suicide, or assault, suicide survivors, victims of abuse/neglect/violence, runaway youth, psychiatric emergencies, and chemically dependent people in crisis<br><br>Assesses the situation and implements the appropriate response<br>- Is inquirer in immediate danger?<br>- In cases of domestic violence inquiries, ensure that the assailant has left the vicinity and determine whether inquirer needs emergency medical treatment<br>- Obtains pertinent data early in the conversation, | - Understands the limits of I&R in the event of a crisis | "Will you wait on the line while I get help?"<br><br>"Will you promise not to hurt yourself until we have found some help?<br><br>"Would you be willing to let me see what resources are out there for you?"<br><br>"I know you and I are talking over the phone, but I wonder, would you be interested in having someone come out to check on you and perhaps sit with you for a while?" | |

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| | such as the inquirer's name, location, and phone number (depending on the immediacy of the need<br>- Allows the inquirer to talk freely<br>- Uses active listening skills and validates the inquirer's feelings<br><br>- Connects inquirer to appropriate channels for crisis intervention and 24-hour follow-up (e.g. connecting to 9-1-1, crisis hotline warm transfer, individual counseling resources, etc.)<br><br>- Conducts lethality assessment and follows lethality tool in the database when inquirer presents potential cues or phrases that indicate desire to self-harm or harm others<br><br>- In cases of suspected child or elder abuse, specialist contacts appropriate channels to report abuse (e.g. CPS, APS)<br><br>- Accurately logs crisis contact type, referrals, and | | | |

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| | advocacy taken in contact form notes of database | | | |

## I&R Provision

| Quality Indicator | Definition | Purpose | Key Phrases or Behavior Examples | Additional Considerations |
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| **11.** Avoids giving personal advice/opinion | - Provides inquirer with a menu of options, not a detailed assignment<br><br>- Avoids political commentary or offering personal opinions about resources in database<br><br>- Seeks to provide inquirer with multiple options, without becoming case management | - Empowers inquirer by providing various approaches to their situation, giving them a range of options<br><br>- Maintains objectivity about community resources, mitigating risk of influencing inquirer with personal biases | "You have a few different options to start with. If any of these are not what you are looking for, you can always give us a call back. We are here 24/7."<br><br>**Avoid**:<br>"Well I have done…"<br><br>"When this happened to me…"<br><br>"You should really call...." | - Item should not be scored N/A, as either the specialist refrained from offering personal advice/opinions or they did not |
| **12.** Appropriate referral(s) given (based on need, distance, eligibility, etc.) | - Referrals or information provided are indeed linked to the inquirer's actual need(s)<br><br>- Specialist avoids providing inquirer referrals to resources that are: outside of inquirer's service area, | - Demonstrates that specialist listened to inquirer's concerns/needs<br><br>- Establishes rapport and quality customer service<br><br>- Ensures inquirer receives the most accurate | "The next resource that might be able to help you with your rent bill is..."<br><br>"It looks like this clinic is no longer accepting new patients. Would you like me to see if there are any other | - Item scored N/A if it was an unmet need<br><br>- This section does not apply to specialists who attempt to problem-solve |

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| | no longer accepting new clients, open on a day when the inquirer cannot go, unless inquirer specifically requests specialist to do so<br><br>- Referrals should be appropriate to inquirer's situation and the most relevant resources<br><br>- Effectively uses the 2-1-1 database to identify resources | resources for stated need(s) | community clinics in your area that might work?"<br><br>"I found a few food pantries in your area where you do not need to make an appointment."<br><br>- Confirms whether there are specific preferences or requirements (e.g. evening hours, proximity to public transit, etc.) | with inquirers in areas where resources are limited, as in rural areas or where resources may not exist as readily for a particular need |
| **13.** Provides all pertinent program information (program name, phone #, hours, requirements, etc.) | - Provides all relevant program details for all referrals including phone numbers, addresses, hours, and eligibility information. The information should be accurate and pertinent to the request. Enough information should be giving to help the inquirer make an informed choice | - Ensures inquirer receives everything they need to contact the referral<br><br>- Educates inquirer about any needed documentation to bring to first appointment, mitigating risks of having to reschedule | "__ food pantry is open Wednesdays from 5-7pm. You do not need an appointment at this one, but be sure to bring a bag to receive food. Their phone number and address is..."<br><br>"Before you go for your first appointment, be sure to bring a copy of your rent bill and past-due notice from your landlord."<br><br>"This program provides transportation assistance for adults 65 and older Monday through Saturday. They request that you call for an | - Item scored N/A if it was an unmet need<br><br>- Verify with iCarol resource record |

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| | | | appointment at least 48-hours in advance." | |
| **14.**<br><br>Provides at least 3 referrals per need, when available | - Where possible and practical, provide at least 3 referrals<br><br>- Specialist uses cues from the inquirer to determine if he/she may be overwhelmed by too many options<br><br>- All referrals should be logged in database | - Gives the inquirer various options to addressing his or her concerns<br><br>- Protects the I&R service from being perceived as making a "recommendation" | "Would you like to get started with those for now and give us a call if they are not what you are looking for?"<br><br>"Those are the only two resources I am seeing here for…Is there anything else I can help you with?" | - Item scored N/A if it was an unmet need |
| **15.**<br>Avoids jargon, uses simple statements | - Uses plain language<br><br>- Avoids industry language | - Removes any false feelings of hierarchy in the helping relationship<br><br>- Ensures any inquirer can understand the information provided | "It sounds like you have a lot going on. I wonder, would you be interested in talking with someone who can meet with you regularly face to face to help?"<br><br>**Avoids**:<br>"Have you called _agency and asked about their eligibility criteria?" | - Item should not be scored N/A, as either the Specialist refrained from using jargon or they did not |
| **16.**<br>Provides advocacy and asks permission for advocacy when needed | - When appropriate, empowers inquirer with information or language needed to call on their own, suggesting ways the inquirer can advocate for themselves | - Provides enhanced information and referral for callers who are not able to call on their own<br><br>- Demonstrates sensitivity, positive customer | "You definitely have tried a lot of the right places and asked the right questions. I wonder, would you like if I call the agency with you on the phone? We can explain | - Item scored N/A if it is evident advocacy was not needed (e.g. information inquires, inquiries where |

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| | - If advocacy is provided, inquirer's consent must be obtained before information can be disclosed<br>- Appropriately identifies characteristics of inquirer's who may need or want advocacy:<br>- Callers who need assistance to communicate their needs to a service provider or otherwise represent themselves<br>- Vulnerable populations such as children, elderly, callers who experience a mental or physical limitations or need additional assistance, callers who appear confused or disoriented<br>- Cases in which the life or well-being of an individual is in jeopardy: child abuse, elder abuse, homicide, suicide, domestic violence, etc.<br>- Callers who present angry or frustrated because they feel they have faced undue hardship in finding an agency available to them<br>- Callers who have a complaint about a service | service, and validates inquirer's feelings who feel no one is able or willing to help them<br><br>- Takes proactive, protective measures for inquirer, or an associated individual, whose life or well-being may be in danger or at risk | the situation and see if you can get the help you need."<br><br>"May I have your permission to have someone come out and check on you?"<br><br>"I am glad you gave us a call. I would like to transfer you to the program and explain your situation if that is alright with you."<br><br>"When you call this agency, you will want to ask to speak to a caseworker. That is a person who may be able to work with you more closely to make sure you get the help you need."<br><br>"If you would like, I can take down your first name and phone number and call a few places to see what help we can find….Hi this is [name] again from 2-1-1. We spoke about an hour ago about your need for __. I have a person on the line from __ agency, and he's willing to hear our story and see if there's something he can do to help. Why don't you tell them what you | it is clear inquirer understands the information necessary and presents capable of calling on their own) |

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| | | | shared with me about the situation?" | |
| **17.** Avoids long pauses (<10 seconds) | - In instances of long pauses (or muting audio), explains to inquirer why this is happening | - Assures inquirer that specialist is still there<br><br>- Does not leave inquirer in the dark while performing referral search<br><br>- Ensures that inquirer feels engaged throughout the interaction | "I am still here, I am just doing a little research."<br><br>"Still looking for something in your area. Just a moment." | - Item should not be scored N/A, as either the Specialist refrained from long pauses or they did not |
| **18.** Follows appropriate procedures if caller placed on hold (permission, return and status update, thank caller upon return) | - Asks inquirer's permission to be placed on hold while specialist searches for resources or consults a supervisor<br><br>- Returns and provides a status update<br><br>- Thanks inquirer for holding upon return | - Assures inquirer that their time is valuable to specialist<br><br>- Does not leave inquirer in the dark while performing referral search<br><br>- Keeps inquirer engaged throughout I&R process | "Would it be ok if I place you on a brief hold to look up some resources?"<br><br>"Wanted to let you know I am still doing a little research."<br><br>"Thank you so much for holding. I was able to find a few resources that help with…" | - Item scored N/A if inquirer was not placed on hold<br><br>- As best as possible, specialists should try to avoid having to place a inquirer on hold |
| **19.** Explores/ problem solves when no resources are available | - Asks caller if they have friends/family that might be able to help with the situation<br><br>- Builds awareness that some faith-based groups sometimes help with | - Seeks to connect caller to potential next step in addressing their situation after they hang up, regardless if it is a resource in the 2-1-1 database or a personal resource | "I am sorry, I am having trouble finding anything in your area to help with that. Are there any other bills that you could use help with that might free up some resources?" | - Item scored N/A if need was met/referrals were given |

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| | community members' needs<br><br>- Models and brainstorms with caller on potential alternative avenues for addressing need(s)<br><br>- In situations where a referral cannot be given, the presenting need must be recorded as unmet. The recording of an unmet need must be qualified by the recording of a reason for its being unmet. | - Broadens the caller's potential menu of options for addressing the need or request | "Has anything like this happened to you before?"<br><br>"Can you remember what worked for you the last time you went through something like this?"<br><br>"Do you have a back-up plan if you are not able to find assistance for _?"<br><br>"Have you tried to talk to utility company to see if you can make a payment plan or arrangement?" | |
| **20.** Accurately records unmet needs | - In situations where a referral cannot be given, the presenting need must be recorded as unmet. The recording of an unmet need must be qualified by the recording of a reason for its being unmet. | - Recording unmet needs can inform outreach efforts for planning organizations, nonprofits or other service providers such as faith based organizations, schools, etc. | | - Item scored NA if need was met/referrals were given. |

## Professionalism/Communication Skills

| Quality Indicator | Definition | Purpose | Key Phrases or Behavior Examples | Additional Considerations |
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| **21.** Uses active listening skills and engages inquirer appropriately | - Pays close attention to what the inquirer is stating<br><br>- Avoids having the inquirer repeat something unnecessarily<br><br>- Avoids drawing conclusions<br><br>- Uses minimal encouragers<br><br>- Tone and inflection are appropriate to inquirer's situation (avoids flippant, upbeat tone if inquirer appears distraught or angry)<br><br>- Refrains from talking over inquirer<br><br>- Uses reflective statements to let the inquirer know the specialist is listening | - Demonstrates that specialist is able to appropriately take cues from the inquirer<br><br>- Cultivates rapport and seeks to create a space where inquirer is comfortable sharing<br><br>- Communicates to inquirer that they matter, this is not just another inquiry<br><br>- Ensures specialist fully comprehends inquirer's reason for contacting 2-1-1<br><br>- Helps specialist identify potential underlying, perhaps unstated, needs | "I see"<br><br>"mmhmm"<br><br>"Tell me more"<br><br>"You've had to contact a lot of agencies. You sound frustrated and have a right to feel that way."<br><br>"So you're worried about ___?"<br><br>"You're tired of getting the run around. Why don't we see what we can do to help point you in the right direction. " | - Item should not be scored N/A, as Specialist either applied active listening skills and engaged the inquirer appropriately or they did not |
| **22.** Establishes rapport with inquirer | - Demonstrates genuine interest in inquirer's situation<br><br>- Engages inquirer throughout interaction | - Creates an environment where inquirer feels welcomed, valued, and comfortable sharing<br><br>- Provides a positive customer service experience | "How are you today?"<br><br>"I am glad you called. Let me see what I can find for you."<br><br>"It sounds like you've done a great job holding everything together. I'm really glad you felt you could reach out and ask for help." | - Item should not be scored N/A, as Specialist either *made an effort* to establish rapport or they did not, regardless if an inquirer does not create space |

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| | | | | or respond to it (e.g. hangs up, rushes interaction due to time constraint, etc.) |
| **23.** Avoids interrupting inquirer unnecessarily | - Avoids cutting inquirer off, while maintaining control of the conversation<br><br>- Does not talk over inquirer<br><br>- Does not talk down to inquirer<br><br>- Should specialist need to interrupt inquirer to redirect or refocus, should be done so in a professional, kind manner | - Ensures conversation stays on topic<br><br>- Prevents inquirer from "rambling," ensuring caller gets the needed help, specialist does not get drained, and respects incoming inquiries<br><br>- Specialist should not assume they know what the inquirer needs and speaks while they are talking<br><br>- Allows specialist to better hear unspoken needs | "I am sorry to interrupt…" | - Item should not be scored N/A, as Specialist either *made an effort* to avoid interrupt the inquirer unnecessarily or they did not |
| **24.** Tone of voice is clear, pleasant, and calm | - Appropriate tone of voice and inflection used to convey empathy and engagement with the inquirer's situation<br><br>- Tone of voice is warm, kind and inviting | - Cultivates an environment where caller feels welcomed<br><br>- Words are not run together, but clear, so caller can understand information being provided | | - On calls: Item should not be scored N/A, as the Specialist's tone of voice should be clear and pleasant on all calls. Specialist can engage in |

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| | - Tone of voice should not be flat, sharp, harsh, short, or judgmental<br>- Whether it is the first or the last call of the day, tone should communicate the same level of service | - Creates positive customer service experience | | boundary setting with challenging inquirers and still maintain a clear, professional tone. |
| **25.** Responds to inquirer in professional, non-judgmental, culturally appropriate and timely manner | - Tone of voice is kind, warm, and welcoming<br>- Avoids speaking down to caller<br>- Avoids judging caller for having stated need or request<br>- Specialist validates the caller's effort to address the problem thus far<br>- Avoids slang like "ain't" or "gunna" | - Validates caller's feelings<br>- Where stigma is often present in helping situations, assures caller 2-1-1 is not here to judge and pleased to help<br>- Removes barriers/establishes rapport so caller feels comfortable sharing details of situation that will help specialist in determining an appropriate referral<br>- Affirms caller's dignity<br>- Ensures specialist appears professional and knowledgeable | "You have definitely called the right places. Let me see what else I might be able to find."<br>"I'll be happy to assist you."<br>"I am glad you called us today."<br>"It's not a problem to look up those resources. Let's see what we can find."<br>**Avoids:**<br>"Why having you tried asking your family for help yet?"<br>"Why didn't you call before this was due?" | - Item should not be scored N/A as Specialist was professional and timely in response or they were not |
| **26.** | - Involves effort to understand the inquirer's | - Demonstrates specialist is genuinely interested in | "It's clear that you've been trying very hard to take the right steps." | - Item scored N/A if clear inquirer does not want |

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| Expresses empathy appropriately | feelings and respond appropriately<br><br>- Uses at least one empathetic statement or minimal encourager as appropriate<br><br>- Tone of voice and inflection is appropriate based on inquirer's need(s)<br><br>- Accurately identifies opportunities to demonstrate empathy (e.g. hardship, loss of job or family member, anger at not being able to find help) | inquirer's situation and feelings | "I understand that must be difficult…"<br><br>"It took a lot of courage for you to call today."<br><br>"It sounds like you have been trying very hard to cope with this." | anything more than information/referrals from their call to 2-1-1 (e.g. "business focused")<br><br>- "No" will be given if there were clear opportunities for empathy and the specialist did not utilize empathy statements<br><br>- Not all contacts require verbal empathy statements: empathy can be communicated through tone of voice, minimal encouragers |
| **27.** Delivers "bad news" gently and with kindness | - Information cushioned/delivered with empathetic tone<br><br>- "Bad news" includes, but is not limited to, cases where no resource for a particular | - Communicates that specialist understand and is mindful of difficulty in no resources being available | "I apologize, I am not finding anything in database for that. Is there something else I can possibly help with?"<br><br>"I'm really sorry, but that training program is only for | - Item scored N/A if need was met/referral given |

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| | need, or in a particular region, is not available<br><br>- Specialist requests how else they may help inquirer | | people who are under 45 years."<br><br>"Unfortunately I am not seeing any resources for..." | |
| **28.** Appropriately addresses challenging, chronic, or disrespectful inquirers | - Specialist communicates that they will not allow profanity, vulgar, lewd, or disrespectful language<br><br>- Specialists warns inquirer that conversation will be disconnected if the behavior continues<br><br>- Maintains calm, respectful demeanor during the interaction | - Creates boundaries that protect the specialist<br><br>- Avoids risk or perception that 2-1-1 allows derogatory language about a particular population<br><br>- Sets expectations and rules and engagement for I&R service | "If you continue to use that language, I will disconnect the call."<br><br>"I am happy to help, I just cannot do so if you continue to yell."<br><br>"We're aware that you have called multiple times today and will not able to assist you if you continue to…" | - Item scored N/A if conversation is not categorized as challenging or disrespectful |
| **29.** Controls and maintains proper pace | - Specialist focuses on providing high-quality customer experience while remaining conscious of contact volume and productivity<br><br>- Avoids unnecessary conversation that is not pertinent to resolving the inquirer's stated need(s)/request(s) | - Prevents interactions from being extended unnecessarily<br><br>- Demonstrates that inquirer's time is valuable<br><br>- Shows genuine interest in understanding the inquirer's situation<br><br>- Ensures accurate assessment is provided, | "I am happy to provide you that information. Let me try to get you to the places that might be able to help you."<br><br>"Would you like to give those resources a call for now? If you need any other help we are here 24/7 and you are more than welcome to call back." | - Item is scored on Specialist's demonstration of effort to control and maintain proper pace and should not be scored N/A. |

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| | - Avoids rushing the conversation<br><br>- Speaks slowly when dictating information | and details or clues on underlying needs are not overlooked | | |

## Closing

| Quality Indicator | Definition | Purpose | Key Phrases or Behavior Examples | Additional Considerations |
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| **30.**<br><br>Asks "is there anything else I can help you with?" | - Before closing the conversation, ask "Is there anything else I might be able to assist you with?" | - Ensures that inquirer has all the information they need to contact the program<br><br>- Assesses for additional needs | "Is there anything else I can help you with today?"<br><br>"Did you get all the information about the agencies? I am happy to repeat a number or address if you need me to."<br><br>"Is there anything I can help with before I transfer you?"<br><br>"Will this be enough to get you going for now? Remember, you can call back anytime." | - Item scored N/A if inquirer disconnects before Specialist had an opportunity to ask |

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| **31.** Thanks inquirer for contacting 2-1-1 and encourages them to reach out again if/when needed | - Encourages inquirer to contact 2-1-1 again if further assistance is needed, their situation changes, or if information provided proves incorrect, inappropriate, or insufficient | - Demonstrates that specialist is genuinely interested in helping inquirer meet his or her stated need(s)<br><br>- Affirms to inquirer that 2-1-1 is available 24/7 | "Thank you for calling 2-1-1 _. We are here 24/7, so give us a call if you need anything else or if those agencies are not what you are looking for."<br><br>"Thanks again for calling. Give us a call anytime, if other things pop up, we are here 24/7." | - Item scored N/A if inquirer disconnects before Specialist had an opportunity to thank them for contacting 2-1-1 |

## Follow-up Protocol (if applicable)

| Quality Indicator | Definition | Purpose | Key Phrases or Behavior Examples | Additional Considerations |
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| **32.** Offers follow-ups for endangerment, basic needs, and vulnerable population calls, as needed | - Specialist offers follow-up for inquirers who are at risk and/or vulnerable and in situations where the Specialist believes that inquirers do not have the necessary capacity to follow through and resolve their problems<br><br>Example situations that may trigger follow-up include, but are not limited to:<br>- Elderly callers inquiring about food assistance<br>- Inquirers with children requesting information about shelter services | - Measures effectiveness of referral provided<br><br>- Identifies additional needs/barriers<br><br>- Follow-up information is used as a further means of evaluating the effectiveness of existing community service providers and for identifying gaps in community services | "Would you like us to give you a call in a week or so to check in and see if you were able to get the help you needed?"<br><br>"I realize you have a lot on your plate. Would you like us to reach out in a few days to see if those places were able to help?"<br><br>"Someone from our agency will be calling you in a few days to see if you were able to get the help you needed." | - Item scored N/A if inquirer disconnects before Specialist has a chance to offer |

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| | - Situations where advocacy was provided | | | |
| **33.** Asks inquirer's consent to follow-up and if it is ok to mention 2-1-1 when calling back | - To ensure caller safety, follow-up is not conducted on domestic violence calls<br>- Consents caller to receive outbound follow-up | - Protects safety and privacy of inquirer | "May I have your first name and phone number to follow-up with you in about a week?"<br>"If we call and someone else were to answer, is it ok if we mention 2-1-1?" | - Item scored N/A if inquirer was not offered a follow-up |