

2005 INNOVATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

APPLICATION

Deadline: April 4, 2005

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1. **Program Name:** MinnesotaHelp.info
2. **Administering Agency:** Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA)
3. **Contact Person (Name and Title):** Krista Boston, Manager for Consumer Choices Team and Project Director for MinnesotaHelp.info
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7. **E-mail Address:** Krista.Boston@state.mn.us
8. **Web site Address:** www.MinnesotaHelp.info
9. **Please provide a two-sentence description of the program:** MinnesotaHelp.info is the state of Minnesota's most comprehensive online human services database. It contains over 30,000 services and resources for providers and consumers of all ages, income levels and abilities.
10. **How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on May 1, 2005 to be considered.**
MinnesotaHelp.info became operational in January 2003.
11. **Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address? Indicate how the program applies to the "change driver" that you listed above.**
The consumers we serve are changing, which means we must adapt our approach to the way we assist them. An effective information and access system has become recognized as one of the key strategies to Minnesota's ability to successfully manage the increasing numbers of people who will:
 - Access long-term care supports and other services over the next several decades
 - Seek assistance in supporting their families and children in a variety of activities

- Manage families in a more complex world with dynamic economic, technological and social environments

A basic behavior of consumers is that they *generally seek information* at the time in which the *information is needed*, and in the *format that is most convenient* and familiar to them. Each person is different, based on the way they learn and retain information. For some, a conversation with a person is necessary to create an understanding; for others, the Internet is the primary information source. Still others want something to read or need a visual picture. This is a basic tenet of communication. Consumers access information based on their unique differences that might be based on age, educational level, language use, and physical and mental abilities.

In recent years, state and local agencies have begun to recognize these nuances to information delivery and have shifted the dispersal of information to more aptly meet the needs of a diverse public.

In shaping and reshaping programs and finance agencies, policy makers must recognize that:

- Internet use is increasing for all people regardless of income, education, age, race, ethnicity, or gender
- 68% of Americans currently have some sort of access to the Internet
- Of Internet users, 35% have used the Internet to seek health information and 39% indicate that they have used the Internet to seek health information for another person, such as a family member. About one in four says their use of the Internet played a key role in the way they took care of that loved one.

Finally, empirical studies conducted on consumer behavior show that:

- A lack of understanding of health care options limits peoples' ability to care for their health problems
- Inadequate access to information may lead to poor health outcomes, increased risk of health status changes and increased risk of hospitalization
- Much of what is produced for consumers, both in print and for the Internet, is at a higher literacy level than the average reading level of the American public and fails to communicate the basic information it intends.

Clearly, in the health and human services arena, the Internet must play a key role in how government shapes consumers' behaviors and choices. Secondly, Internet-based information must be made available in a range of options to meet a variety of literacy and language needs.

MinnesotaHelp.info is "driving change" for information dissemination for the entire state. It is part of a larger mission to create a "No Wrong Door" system of information access. The system is designed so that no matter how users enter the system whether through a clinic kiosk, library, senior center, community agencies, county staff, or other 'door', they get the same consistent and accurate information. This system allows a large amount of information to disseminate to multiple populations in a variety of communication methods.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

MinnesotaHelp.info is based on a six step process meant to gradually narrow down exact resource needs. Each step narrows the focus of the data until users are left with a list of resources that meet their needs. First users choose the location where they would like resource information; then they choose a category, keyword or program name; then any features or preferences, such as language or disability access, that are important.

A list of programs that match the choices will then appear, with the option to print, save in a personal resource list that can be accessed every time users sign into the site or e-mail the programs to anyone through a personal e-mail account on the system. Users can also send an anonymous e-mail to any service provider who has an account with MinnesotaHelp.info through the free account which is set up by registering with the site.

Users also have the option to get over-the-phone assistance through several statewide call centers. The Senior LinkAge Line®, the Disability LinkAge Line, and the Family LinkAge Line (in development) use the same database as MinnesotaHelp.info to do telephone and in-person assistance. This unique approach allows all people in Minnesota to receive the same accurate and comprehensive information in a consistent manner.

Resources are kept up to date by local information and referral professionals in individual states and counties. The resource database contains information on the community services individuals and communities need to sustain and improve their daily lives--health care and childcare, job training, education and recreation, retirement, disability and social service information. The directory contains information on nonprofit and public health and human service programs and some for-profit programs such as housing. As in a library, information is logically organized according to a standard classification system known as the INFO-LINE Taxonomy.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

MinnesotaHelp.info is a unique cross-governmental partnership with collaborations that include other states, universities, counties, non-profits, joint powers, and others. The site includes services from governmental agencies, for-profit and not-for-profit entities, as well as other service providers. It is comprehensive in its nature, putting the needs of consumers above all else. A mission of MinnesotaHelp.info is to ensure that consumers have access to both private and public pay services so that they can support themselves and their families and make informed decisions about the best options to direct their lives.

Additionally, Minnesota was the first to introduce the “No Wrong Door” approach to information and referral services, a concept that has been adopted at the federal level for these kinds of programs. Minnesota was the first in the nation to move forward with this model of service and has provided technical assistance to 16 others states in their implementation of these types of services.

MinnesotaHelp.info has several attractive features:

- It was designed by consumers to search based on specific features such as: close to public transportation, wheelchair accessible, accepts pets, etc.
- The site is translated in to Spanish and Hmong, with plans to expand the available languages as resources are added, including Arabic, Somali, Russian, and Vietnamese
- The site contains over 500 distinct tips with detailed advice for consumers
- Users have the ability to save resources and tips in a customized homepage, and these resources and tips are automatically updated over time
- Users have the ability to provide feedback on the site and services
- The site has a comprehensive process for keeping data relevant and up-to-date
- The site allows providers to control their own record while maintaining continuous quality processes for data review

Unlike other web sites of this type, MinnesotaHelp.info serves all people of all incomes. Topics and target populations are not based on the lead agency, funding source, or partners' interests. MinnesotaHelp.info contains information and services for many specialty populations and has resources on services for: seniors and caregivers, children's and family services, people with disabilities, chemical health, mental health, homeless resources, HIV/AIDS, prescription drugs, legal services, Medicaid and Medicare, plus many others.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Start up costs included \$75,000 for Technical Assistance and Consulting costs to develop the Request For Proposals and evaluate the database products; and \$170,000 for purchase of the Resource House Suite of Tools. Another \$450,000 was used for data maintenance in the first year.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Annual costs for MinnesotaHelp.info include \$100,000 in customizations and technical support and \$650,000 for data maintenance. These amounts include an ongoing maintenance grant of \$22,500 in technical support, \$6,000 for web hosting, an Escrow fee of \$1,650, plus other misc. fees of \$2,000 per year.

16. How is the program funded?

MinnesotaHelp.info brings many partners together and continually seeks to collaborate with relevant entities. At this time, the project receives funding from the Minnesota Board on Aging as the Lead Project Manager, Children and Families Services Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Disability Services Division of DHS.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

MinnesotaHelp.info website was developed in response to recommendations of the Long-term Care Task Force, a tri-partisan task force that developed a broad set of recommendations related to long-term care reform in Minnesota. As a result of these recommendations, the 2001 Minnesota legislature supported an improved information and assistance network to provide choices about long-term care options for older Minnesotans and their caregivers.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program? A master database houses the data connected to The Resource House Suite of Tools Applications (Administer, Referral, Directory, Report, Data Manager), and to the MinnesotaHelp.info website.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

This concept of a resource database is not unique to Minnesota, however the collaboration between the website, in-person assistance, and over-the-telephone help is more comprehensive than existing systems in other states.

Minnesota was the first to introduce the "No Wrong Door" approach to information and referral services, a concept that has been adopted at the federal level for these kinds of programs. Minnesota was the first in the nation to move forward with this model of service and has provided technical assistance to 16 other states in their implementation of these types of services.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Minnesota has become recognized as a primary expert in the development of statewide access systems of this type. Staff have provided subject matter expertise and technical assistance to 15 states through one to one meetings, NASUA and the National Technical Assistance Exchange Network sponsored by CMS and The Lewin Group. Minnesota is also now part of a multi-state collaborative effort with the states of Washington and Ohio in the continued enhancement of the software and web site with a focus on the newest relevant technology.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The program has been fully implemented, however the site continues to expand and adapt according to consumer and professional needs. Enhancements recently completed or are in process include:

- *Handheld Device:* Making the site available for download to a PDA
- *State's Most Comprehensive Services Database:* Ensuring all licensed providers and Medicaid and Medicare Certified Providers are in the database and coded to

the appropriate payor source, allowing consumers to search based on payor source and vacancies (Winter 2005)

- *Text Interface for use with Screen Readers*: Roll out in Spring of 2005.
- *Cell Phone Access*: Making the site available to cell phone users that have web capabilities
- *Automated Data Collection*: Using data mining technologies to reduce the amount of human interaction required to populate the database, and allowing providers to revise their data online with review by a trained data manager to ensure quality of data (Provider Portal rolled out in Summer 2004)
- *Interactivity with Guided Choices*: Creating enhanced consumer interfaces to the database based on unique user groups, which are rooted in the research-based algorithms that result in the most accurate and appropriate data set (initially a long-term care screening tool to roll out in March 2005) A youth interface focusing on youth in transition is also planned.
- *Data Sharing and Automation of Formal Screening*: Using .xml data sharing strategies and automating formal screening processes to ensure that the site can interactively move people through systems without requiring them to fill out a form multiple times (professional screening interface in development and scheduled for roll out in Spring 2005)
- *Access for Community Resource Centers*: Creating a network of local community resource centers where people can go to consult directly with trained staff and have access to the most accurate and up-to-date information in order to support caregivers and the people they care for of all ages (Hennepin County opened the first resource center at the Brookdale Service Center, Brookdale Library on September 30, 2004)
- *Vacancy Tracking*: Tracking vacancies in services and housing in order to support the discharge planning function and promote the recommendation of home and community-based care over institutional options (Provider Annex rolled out in Summer 2004 with Vacancy Tracking Project to roll out in Spring 2005)
- *Quality Profiles*: Making quality information available about the resource data to allow the consumer to access quality assessment information from other consumers and government data sources (Quality Profiles Project in development phase)
- *Power User Search*: The creation of an advanced searching option for professionals and power users that has many results (Roll out in Spring 2005)

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

MinnesotaHelp.info is a highly effective program. It has changed the way people look at information technology and has helped thousands of users with countless services since its inception

- There are over 12,500 agencies listed on the site and nearly 30,000 services are represented at more than 17,000 locations.

- Although the site has not been marketed on a widespread basis, from January 2004 through December 2004, there were 43,295 unique users, a dramatic increase over the previous year.

Users have been assisted in multiple ways:

A mother living in California was able to find mental health resources for her son living in a Minneapolis suburb. She was concerned that he was a harm to himself and would refuse treatment. Living so far away intensified her fears. A DHS staff, using MinnesotaHelp.info, was able to refer her to social services specific to his area, the Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health, the local county who could perform a home visit, and the local police just in case.

A Northern Minnesota woman sought information for her mother who is 63 years old with metastatic lung cancer and receiving radiation treatments. The mother's health insurance was running out at the end of the month, she didn't seem eligible for Medical Assistance or other state programs. MinnesotaHelp.info connected this woman with a health insurance counselor in her area who came to her house for one-on-one assistance, cancer support groups, transportation to her treatments, and help paying for her prescription drugs.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

MinnesotaHelp.info continues to evolve to best meets the needs of its users.

Enhancements to the site include: making the site available to a PDA, adding DHS licensed providers, a text interface for use with screen readers, automated data collection, enhanced consumer interfaces (a long-term care screening tool and an interface for youth in transition), availability in community resource centers, vacancy tracking, and a power user version to name few.

An important subsidiary of the MinnesotaHelp.info website is the MinnesotaHelp.info Network through the Aging & Disability Resource Center Grant. The Administration on Aging and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services funded a 3-year initiative to provide citizen-centered "one stop shop" entry points to the long-term care support system. These centers will be located in local communities and be accessible to people who may require long-term care support. The Resource Centers will serve individuals who need long-term care support, their family caregivers, and those planning for future long-term care support needs. They will also serve as a resource for professionals who provide services to the elderly and people with disabilities. The Resource Centers utilize the MinnesotaHelp Information Network which is made up of a collection of print and electronic resources designed to assist older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, and others locate information about long-term care services and resources. For consumers who want to discuss their options with a professional, telephone and in-person assistance is available.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

MinnesotaHelp.info was able to start with an existing, though incomplete, database of services and providers. The site had a baseline to start from and add to, so starting from scratch would prove more challenging for states if they do not have something similar in existence. Similarly, data integrity is an ongoing process that states will have to take on. Assuring data stays current, relevant, and comprehensive must be part of the ongoing project.

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