Tips for writing agency, site, or program descriptions

The intent of 211 Manitoba is to assist individuals in finding the right services for their needs at the right time. In order to do so, it is important that we include all services that meet our inclusion policy AND that they are written in a way that ensures they can be found.

Understanding how the 211 search engine and taxonomy (categorization) work is helpful when describing your organization and its services/programs. Additionally, the 211 Manitoba database is guided by international standards established by AIRS (Alliance of Information & Referral Systems). To that end, we request that you adhere as closely as possible to the standards and tips outlined below.

Familiarize yourself with the difference in 211 between an agency record, a site record, and a program record. For details, see our tip sheet here.

The description should:

- Be written in point form.
- Be concise, concrete, and precise. Avoid general descriptions that are akin to mission statements, for example 'seeks to alleviate poverty.' For example, the statement 'alleviates poverty' does not help determine if the service is appropriate for someone with mental health issues, is leaving an abusive relationship, or needs food now. Instead write 'provides food hampers to local families.' General statements do not help determine appropriate referrals and information.
- Use clear language. Our standards aim at roughly a grade 8 level. The descriptions need to be clearly understood by all ages and levels of English, including newcomers (or their service providers). It's helpful to consider how the description might sound when read out loud, either over the phone by a service provider, or by software for the visually impaired.
- Use action verbs especially in the program description: terms such as "offers", "provides", "donates", etc.

United Way For a Better Winnipeg

Volunteer Manitoba building Community building Capacity

- Include only one service in each service record. For example, if a youth drop-in centre offers job training AND nutritious cooking classes, these two services would require two separate records.
- Identify whether the given service is exclusive to a given target population or open to anybody? This identification helps us assign appropriate codes to a given service and ensures that it can be found using the quick links on the search page. In most cases this information will be recorded in the eligibility field, and not in the description field itself.
- Clearly identify specific eligibility requirements in the 'Eligibility' field of the record. This includes age limits, but can also refer to, for example, gender (i.e. is this service exclusively for men?) ethnic groups (i.e. Indigenous, Métis, Irish, Ghanaian, Syrian), or residents of a home.
- Identify if one must be enrolled in another program at your agency to access a given service. For example a Family Resource Centre may have a homework club, but only for registered participants. In these cases, the program may be included in the overall service description but not require a separate record.