

Concept Proposal

NEAIRS

The New England Alliance of I&R Services and NEAIRS Registry of Certified I&R Programs

Summary

This concept brief proposes the establishment of a New England AIRS, and a NEAIRS Registry, in order to strengthen efforts on a regional level to promote and provide professional Information & Referral services throughout New England. NEAIRS would become a regional affiliate of the national Alliance of Information & Referral Systems, and would offer a variety of programs and services to the member I&R agencies. This association could be sustained by a combination of membership dues and public/private grants. This proposal will be discussed at September 25th I&R Symposium in Waterbury Vermont.

Need

There are 28 state affiliates of AIRS, but none in New England. A decade ago there may have been as many as 5 of the 7 New England states with Affiliate organizations. Of the 150 I&R programs across the USA who currently have AIRS Accreditation, only 2 are from New England (CT211 and VT211). The current cost for national accreditation is expensive (\$6k for AIRS members), and the process is considered arduous by many.

Only 1 of 27 national AIRS Board Members, Appointed Positions, & National Partners are based in New England. It appears in many ways that New England is underrepresented within the AIRS organization, and that the interests of the New England I&R field, programs, and professionals might be better served, both within the region and at the national level, through the establishment of a regional AIRS Affiliate.

Programs & Services

NEAIRS would offer programs and services to be determined by the Membership and the governing body.

These probably can be grouped into the following functional categories:

- **Communicating** – NEAIRS could foster enhanced communication within the network of I&R, but also directed toward communities, elected officials, funders, and the business community. In addition, NEAIRS will provide the New England I&R field with a stronger voice in AIRS.
- **Conferencing** – NEAIRS could coordinate an annual I&R symposium, and promote professional development through webinars and video conferencing.

- **Credentialing** - NEAIRS could design and implement plans for a *New England I&R Registry of Certified I&R Programs*. This could be based upon the Vermont I&R Self-Assessment Tool, the AIRS professional standards, and/or other tools already in operation. The key purpose of the Registry would be to offer an affordable and attainable organizational credential that assures consumers, funders, and public officials that those agencies claiming to provide I&R services are in fact operating in accordance with specific professional quality standards. NEAIRS would establish a certification process that would be less arduous and expensive than the AIRS Accreditation, and thus would more likely be undertaken and completed by a significant number of I&Rs throughout New England. Having 50-100 I&R programs certified through this process would be an enormous step toward quality assurance. Although not as prestigious as AIRS Accreditation, it would advance the professional reputation of the field.
- **Collaborating** – NEAIRS could establish a number of network work groups, in areas such as resource development, advocacy/public policy, social media, professional development, that could communicate through the *AIRStnetworker* (and/or a regional NEAIRS listserv), and meet through video conferencing.

Membership

It is estimated there are at least 200 I&R programs in New England that may be interested in becoming a member of NEAIRS. These include:

- The 6 state-wide 211 systems
- Aging & Disability I&R programs
- Child Care Resource & Referral agencies
- Independent community-based I&R services (not part of the 211 systems)
- Military family support I&Rs
- Other specialized I&Rs (e.g., Youth Services, LBGTQ, Women's Services)

Budget

NEAIRS could be an unincorporated volunteer-driven association, guided by a Steering Committee. To have a more significant impact, particularly through the design and operation of a program certification program such as the proposed NEAIRS Registry, the organization probably should be incorporated as a tax-exempt and non-profit entity. This would involve creating organizational documents and a Board of Directors. It would also require the hiring of at least a part-time staff member, and a modest budget to be sustained by member fees and grants.