Chapter 8
Reducing the Administrative Burden by Online Information and Referral Services

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ABSTRACT
Public Authorities have increasing difficulties in providing timely and accurate information in response to the wide variety of citizens' enquiries to which they are expected to respond. These often require the citizen to be redirected to elsewhere as the query refers to areas of responsibility of other Authorities. This often leads to frustration and wasted time for the citizen, who has to repeatedly explain their query, before obtaining a satisfactory answer. The Information and Referral Services (I&R) are created to help the citizen. This chapter demonstrates how online I&R can help to reduce the administrative burdens while improving the overall quality of service provided, increasing its availability to full 24/7, and significantly reducing the overall cost to the administration. It is shown the case of Community Answers, in Greenwich, Massachusetts, USA, where the online approach has helped to reduce by a third the required to man telephones while the number of calls increased by 25% between 2000 and 2008. That cased is compared with our own experiences with the Call Centre of the city of Terrassa, Catalonia, Europe, where the service with the on-line I&R has attended a third more questions in the years 2007 and 2008

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compared to 2006 without additional costs and similar satisfaction as a result of the adoption of the results of the iSAC6+ European project for the deployment of open source I&R on-line platforms.

The most widely accepted definition of I&R is:

“the active process of linking a person with a need or problem with a service which will meet the need or solve the problem.” (Croneberger and Luck, 1975)

For example, this type of service would provide detailed information, including the contact information, mailing address, and telephone number for organizations that are able to provide childhood immunizations. There are three basic requirements for an I&R service: creation of a resource file (which we are going to refer as the database, or the I&R database); distribution of the information; and updating of the file. I&R services were originally created to serve the disadvantaged members of underserved areas, but few have actually served this type of population exclusively.

I&R services are symptomatic of the complexity of the present mode for delivering human services by public administrations, and reflect a relatively conventional response to the problems created by such complexity. As quoted from (Kronus and Crowe, 1971):

“It is suggested that I&R services represent a conventional response because they grew out of the tangle of human services and have evolved essentially as partners and perpetuators of the present complexity of human services. […] The fact remains that human services remain largely inaccessible to a great number of people who need them. The barriers, such as poverty, ignorance, and prejudice, which prevent the utilization of services, are not easily overcome. …. What appears to be needed is a revolution in the delivery of human services, or the development of an entirely new