

# **The Regional Municipality of York**

Committee of the Whole  
Community and Health Services  
April 4, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

## **Direct Purchase from Findhelp Information Services to Create a Data Inventory of Human Services in York Region**

### **1. Recommendations**

1. Council authorize the purchase of data and web Services from Findhelp Information Services pursuant to the direct purchase provisions of the Purchasing Bylaw, for a term not to exceed five years, at a total cost not to exceed \$444,050 excluding HST.
2. Council authorize the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to negotiate and execute the necessary agreements.

### **2. Summary**

This report seeks Council approval for the Region to enter into a direct purchase agreement with Findhelp Information Services (Findhelp) for the purchase of data and web services to create a data inventory of human services in York Region.

Council approval is required for a direct purchase which exceeds \$150,000 under Section 10 of the Purchasing Bylaw (2017-30). Specifically, Section 10.1 (b) stipulates that any deliverable that exceeds \$150,000 may be procured without issuing a call for bids, provided that, in the opinion of the Commissioner, there is only one legal entity reasonably capable of providing the deliverable. In particular, Findhelp is the exclusive service provider and source of human services data for Ontario 211 - Central Region (covering York, Durham, Peel, and Toronto) and is therefore the only legal entity reasonably capable of providing the Region with such a comprehensive and compatible data inventory.

The agreement will enable York Region to access the data inventory of human service providers used by Ontario 211, the City of Toronto, and other community information services. This information will be used to help residents connect to services provided in the community. In addition, other organizations such as York Regional Police and local municipalities would be able to use the data inventory to assist residents to find the services they need.

## Key Points:

- The Region and its local municipalities help connect people to services, including those delivered by community agencies and other providers
- Information about available human services in York Region is collected by different organizations in a fragmented way
- A central resource with information on available human services in York Region is not available for residents or staff to access
- Findhelp would be the gateway to integrating the Region's human services data into the broader provincial 211 system that connects people to services
- Findhelp manages a data inventory of human service providers for the 211 Ontario Central Region covering York, Durham, Peel, and Toronto
- York Region and its local municipalities will improve their ability to connect people to services and plan for future service needs by using the same inventory

## 3. Background

### **Ontario 211 connects people to human services**

Ontario 211 is a non-profit agency that provides the public with access to information about community and social services. They do this by operating 211, a three digit phone number, and maintaining an online inventory of services available in the community.

All three levels of government and the United Way fund Ontario 211.

Ontario 211 works with [six regional service providers](#) throughout Ontario to deliver 211 services. The regional service providers are comprised of five non-profits and one municipality. Each regional service provider answers the 211 helpline for the regions they cover (Central East Region, Central Region, Central South Region, South West Region, Eastern Region, and Northern Region) and partner with local data providers to contribute to the online inventory of human services.

### **Findhelp is a non-profit service provider for the Central 211 Region covering Durham, Peel, Toronto and York**

On an annual basis, over 1,000,000 web-based searches are conducted by the public and organizations in the online inventory operated by Findhelp. The inventory is maintained in a database that has over 60,000 listings of human services.

Findhelp ensures its database is maintained based on established standards in the information and referral industry. Over 200 updates to the inventory are processed each week, annual verifications take place with organizations, and ongoing adjustments are made through the year as soon as new information comes in.

In addition to having an agreement in place with the City of Toronto for data services, Findhelp regularly works with a range of partners to share community services data with the goal of improving the overall system. These partners include libraries, social planning councils, United Way offices, local and regional governments, and community agencies.

### **Newmarket Public Library collects human services information for Findhelp with limited resources**

Newmarket Public Library operates [YorkInfo.ca](http://YorkInfo.ca). This website provides information about human service agencies, and volunteer opportunities in York Region. Data is collected in collaboration with many of the local public libraries (Georgina, East Gwillimbury, King Township, and Whitchurch-Stouffville). The relevant data gathered for the Yorkinfo website is also submitted to Findhelp for inclusion in its inventory.

Differences in staff time allotments and the prioritization of records maintenance results in outdated and inconsistent information in Findhelp. The large group of data collectors within the library system ensures broad and deep coverage of services in their respective locations, but requires more formalized data partnerships to keep service data up-to-date, comprehensive and consistent.

### **Multiple organizations continue to collect information about available services in York Region in a fragmented way**

There are many human service organizations supporting the needs of York Region residents. These organizations offer a range of valuable services such as employment, mental health, housing, social, and children's and seniors' supports.

Currently there are at least four organizations (YorkInfo.ca, York.ca, Central Healthline, Civic York) maintaining human service agency and program data in York Region. The result is inconsistency, duplication, and confusion about what services are available to residents. It also creates extra work for community agencies to update multiple systems, and often the updating doesn't fully occur.

Residents have expressed concern that finding human services is often a challenge:

- Based on results from the [York Region Seniors Strategy](#), seniors desire easier system navigation
- The Local Immigration Partnership received feedback from newcomers that services are not easy to locate based on currently available online resources
- Through [consultations](#) on the EarlyON and Family Centres, parents/caregivers indicated that it is difficult to find information about services for children

## **The Region needs access to one comprehensive inventory of human services**

The Region is one part of a large system that provides human services to York Region residents. We work with and rely on partnerships with stakeholders and other levels of government to address the needs of the community.

The Region, local municipalities, and other organizations operate contact centres to connect people to government services and other services provided in the community. For York Region, Access York provides information about services in the community, and registration, referral and intake services for programs delivered by York Region. By helping residents to access services of other human service providers in addition to those offered by York Region, residents can more effectively and efficiently address their needs.

The inventory of human services that is maintained by the Region is limited to Regional services and those community services that the Region has become aware of as part of its service delivery to residents. The information does not reflect all human services available in the community.

A comprehensive inventory would permit residents, York Region staff and service providers to access information about the human services available in York Region, such as hours of service and eligibility requirements.

## **4. Analysis**

### **York Region and other human service providers can do more to help York Region residents find the human services they need**

In response to consistent feedback on how challenging it is for residents to find human services, York Region has been examining approaches for developing a comprehensive and accurate data inventory of human services in York Region. Access to quality, accurate data will allow Regional and local municipal contact centres, program staff, York Region residents and organizations to easily locate consistent, relevant information about services. It could also support service innovations. For example, York Regional Police and Paramedic Services have both expressed an interest in accessing the inventory of human services while on site (from cars and ambulances) to provide appropriate referrals.

In addition, having a comprehensive inventory of available human services will strengthen and improve initiatives across the Region such as implementing hubs tailored to the specific needs of a community, and identifying service gaps so that investments in the community are better aligned to where gaps exist.

## **The Region reviewed different options to provide an accessible and accurate data inventory of human services**

Compiling and maintaining a central repository of detailed and current human service providers requires a significant amount of effort. It requires bringing partners together to build a comprehensive database to be integrated into a bigger system and dedicated staff to manage the data and maintain data sharing agreements with organizations that collect the data.

As outlined in Attachment 1, two options to create a data inventory of human services in York Region were explored to determine which approach would give best outcome of connecting residents and providers to services at lowest cost. Based on the review, staff recommend the Region enter into a five-year agreement with Findhelp for access to their human services data and web services and continue to use Access York as the connection point for residents to access this information.

The Region's financial commitment to Findhelp would strengthen the overall data collection system in York Region.

## **Findhelp maintains the most comprehensive and compatible data inventory in Ontario**

Findhelp's comprehensive data inventory in Ontario includes over 60,000 listings of human services. At this time, there is no other entity that can provide the Region with such a comprehensive and compatible data inventory. The Region will be accessing data that is directly compatible with its existing infrastructure and no additional upgrades will be required.

The Region will benefit by integrating its human services data into this broader data pool because it would have access to more accurate information about the human services that are available in the community.

## **An agreement with Findhelp would provide the most effective and efficient approach to having an accessible and accurate data inventory of human services**

A more formalized direct partnership with Findhelp will establish a direct data exchange channel. This will provide opportunities for proactive maintenance of data on services provided by the Region. In addition, an agreement with Findhelp will allow for full integration of the Findhelp inventory into the Region's infrastructure for the purposes of client referrals and service planning.

The agreement will require Findhelp to:

- Collect and maintain the Regional human services data. This data will be incorporated into the broader pool of data records maintained by Findhelp allowing residents and staff access to a comprehensive dataset.

- Develop and implement a data quality audit and improvement plan for human services data in York Region. This plan will identify, review, and address systematic issues affecting the completeness of data so that information is updated consistently and accurately.
- Integrate other data made available through data sharing arrangements. The Region and Findhelp will work together to encourage data sharing agreements and partnerships with data collectors in the Region to ensure data updating efforts are consistent and standardized.
- Provide the Region and local municipalities with the inventory in a digital format for their use. This provides maximum flexibility for using the data within whatever system the local municipality and Region use. In addition, the data can be used to support the development of online and mobile applications. These applications can be targeted to specific audiences (such as seniors, youth, etc.) based on required services.
- Usage reports (based on the types of services that people calling 211 are looking for) that will identify community needs to inform service planning.

**The benefits from an agreement with Findhelp will be realized over time**

The five year agreement with Findhelp will include specific deliverables to create a comprehensive data inventory of human services providers in and around York Region. Subject to the successful negotiation of an agreement, the key deliverables are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1  
Key Deliverables**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>
2019-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate the Region’s and other human services data from across the community into the Findhelp inventory</li> <li>• Finalize the data quality and maintenance plan for the Region</li> <li>• Findhelp will provide the Region with data in a consumable digital format</li> <li>• Enter into data sharing agreements with partners</li> </ul>
2021-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing exports of data in a consumable digital format to the Region and usage reports</li> <li>• Ongoing maintenance of data sharing agreements with partners</li> </ul>

## **An agreement with Findhelp aligns with Regional initiatives**

An agreement with Findhelp aligns with several Regional initiatives:

- Vision 2051 - improving referrals for residents to agencies in the community by incorporating the Findhelp services inventory into Region's case management tool supports the action area of offering services in an integrated, seamless and transparent manner while increasing efficiency and effectiveness of our service delivery model
- The 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan: Delivering trusted and efficient services by advancing technological solutions is identified as a priority area
- Customer Experience Plan - the pillar of empowerment: using data, tools, skills, with authority and responsibilities to deliver exceptional customer experiences at all times
- York Region Seniors Strategy: The importance of seniors needing to access available supports in the community
- YorkInfo Partnership - sharing agenda: The direction to share data and common solutions leads to service improvements, efficiencies and can reduce costs

## **5. Financial**

### **York Region will receive good value from an agreement with Findhelp**

Through an agreement with Findhelp, the Region will capitalize on Findhelp's existing experience, capabilities, data sharing processes and technical infrastructure.

York Region will get access to the complete Findhelp infrastructure and leverage the investment (over \$5.7 million) of other levels of government, the United Way Greater Toronto, and other organizations at a cost that is less than that of one full-time staff position.

The United Way Greater Toronto have committed to providing York Region with \$42,000 in one-time financial support to start the data enhancement process. The arrangement directly supports United Way Greater Toronto's strategic objective of creating a more integrated human services system for residents in York Region.

Table 2 below shows the total cost of this service over the next five years. The total cost is \$486,050, with \$42,000 coming from the United Way and the remainder from York Region. Funding for the Region's portion would come from the Community and Health Services existing operating budget and will be 100 per cent funded through tax levy. In comparison, the cost for the Region to build, collect and manage data for inventory is estimated in the range of \$250,000 annually (see Attachment 1).

**Table 2**  
**Financial Commitment Over Five Years**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total – 5 years (\$)
York Region	101,050	85,750	85,750	85,750	85,750	444,050
United Way Greater Toronto	42,000					42,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>143,005</b>	<b>85,750</b>	<b>85,750</b>	<b>85,750</b>	<b>85,750</b>	<b>486,050</b>

## 6. Local Impact

Local municipalities play an important role in connecting people to services. The Region will meet with local municipalities to inform them of the partnership with Findhelp and their potential role to add to the Findhelp inventory. Through this agreement, local municipal contact centres will be able to access data from Findhelp and have access to specific web tools that will be developed for target groups, such as seniors and youth. Local municipalities will be able to use the data once it is incorporated into the Findhelp inventory which is anticipated to be completed by 2020. The data in the inventory will grow over time and will build upon the limited information that is currently available. Newmarket Public Library will be the data partners to Findhelp, and will continue to coordinate with other libraries and operate YorkInfo.ca.

## 7. Conclusion

This report seeks Council approval to authorize the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to negotiate and execute an agreement between the Region and Findhelp Information Services under the direct purchase provisions of the Purchasing Bylaw. Findhelp is the only legal entity that is reasonably capable of providing the Region with access to a compatible and comprehensive data inventory of human services in the community.

An agreement with Findhelp will enable the Region and local municipalities to access the inventory used by 211 Ontario, the City of Toronto, and other community information services. Access to complete, high quality information about human services will support York Region residents to find the services they need. The investment by the Region will strengthen the system of information in all York Region communities.

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For more information on this report, please contact Lisa Gonsalves, Director, Strategies and Partnership Branch, Community and Health Services at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72090.  
Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Katherine Chislett**  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**  
Chief Administrative Officer

March 21, 2019  
Attachment (1)  
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