

2016-18 Executive Progress Report

Commonwealth of Virginia
Secretary of Health and Human Resources
Department for the Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing

At A Glance

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) promotes accessible communication so that persons who are Deaf and hard of hearing may fully participate in programs, services and opportunities throughout the Commonwealth.

Staffing 9 Salaried Employees, 0 Contracted Employees, 11 Authorized, and 2 Wage Employees.

Financials Budget FY 2017, \$6.91 million, 13.90% from the General Fund.

Trends Legend ↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease, → Steady

Key Perf Areas Legend ↑ Improving, ↓ Worsening, → Maintaining

For more information on administrative key, and productivity measures, go to www.vaperforms.virginia.gov

Background and History

Agency Background Statement

The programs and services of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH), authorized in Chapter 13 of Title 51.5 of the Code of Virginia, ensure that the agency's focus remains on communications access for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind. VDDHH works with consumers, state and local agencies, and the private sector to achieve consistent and effective communication through training, technology, telecommunications access and through the provision of qualified sign language interpreters.

Major Products and Services

VDDHH fulfills its mission and meets the needs of consumers and state agencies through the provision of the following programs and services:

Interpreter Programs, including the Interpreter Service Program (ISP), coordinating sign language interpreters and real-time captioning (CART) for state agencies and Virginia courts; The Directory of Qualified Interpreters, providing direct access to qualified interpreters across the state; and, The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) and the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), offering diagnostic skills assessments to sign language interpreters for community and classroom assignments. VDDHH contracts with qualified sign language interpreters and VQAS raters in order to operate these programs.

The Technology Assistance Program (TAP), providing telecommunications-related equipment to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled.

Outreach Services, available statewide through staff and contracted providers offering training, information and referral, technical assistance and individual problem resolution as well as direct access to the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). In addition, Outreach provides awareness activities across the Commonwealth to promote understanding and awareness of Virginia Relay and emergency preparedness.

Virginia Relay oversight, ensuring effective and efficient operation of Telecommunications Relay Services in the Commonwealth. Virginia Relay is a federally-mandated telecommunications relay service for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or speech disabled. It allows these individuals to use specialized telecommunication devices or features to communicate with standard telephone users.

Customers

Customer Summary

VDDHH is aware of several trends which impact both the make-up of our customer base and our ability to provide coverage for each customer group. The agency expects to continue to see growth in the number of older Virginians who experience hearing loss seeking services. This customer base is increasingly “tech savvy,” and the agency will need to continually update the technology in our programs to meet the needs of this group. The percentage of customers we serve who are hard of hearing is expected to stabilize at or near current levels and this customer group will continue to represent the majority of those served. In addition, this customer group actively seeks assistance from the agency in identifying financial aid resources for the purchase of hearing aids.

Culturally Deaf Virginians (those who are native signers of American Sign Language, from Deaf Families or with strong ties to the Deaf Community) comprise a key customer group as well. This customer group looks to VDDHH to be a highly-visible agency on issues affecting communications access, particularly in state agencies and the highest levels of Virginia Government.

Another segment of the population that will likely continue to seek our services is the growing number of veterans. As hearing loss is the most prevalent disability of returning armed forces personnel, VDDHH will continue to reach out to returning soldiers and expects to see a steady increase in services in this area.

VDDHH also recognizes sign language interpreters as a key customer group as these individuals seek both credentials and opportunities for contract and court assignments through the agency.

State agencies and Virginia courts are yet another critical customer group, seeking both direct services (specifically interpreter services) and consultative services (staff training and technical assistance in meeting the needs of Virginians who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind.)

Customer Table

Predefined Group	User Defined Group	Number Served Annually	Potential Number of Annual Customers	Projected Customer Trend
Consumer	Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing (assumes 1 consumer in each completed interpreter request)	2,127	800,000	Stable
Communication	Interpreters Seeking Credentials (Participated in FY14/Registered in Program History)	216	3,458	Stable
Consumer	Callers requesting Technical Assistance with Technology (not unduplicated count)	22,960	800,000	Increase
Consumer	Virginia Relay Users	49,379	800,000	Stable
Consumer	Technology Assistance Program (TAP) recipients	1,098	800,000	Increase

Finance and Performance Management

Finance

Financial Summary

Funding for the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) is primarily composed of general and special revenue funds. General funds support the outreach, interpreter, and administrative programs of the agency. The remaining 92% of total appropriations are special funds for the provision and oversight of the federally-mandated telecommunications relay service as well as the related equipment distribution program and related Outreach Services. The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening program receives an annual award of up to \$100,000 from a federal special education grant through the Virginia Department of Education and also receives a small annual special fund appropriation for the receipt and expenditure of candidate registration fees.

It is not feasible to compare funding for VDDHH programs and services with those offered by Deaf Services Agencies in other states. The scope and structure of services provided by these agencies across the nation varies greatly.

Fund Sources

Fund Code	Fund Name	FY 2017	FY 2018
0100	General Fund	\$927,452	\$927,545
0200	Special	\$10,838,174	\$5,838,174
1000	Federal Trust	\$100,000	\$100,000

Revenue Summary

VDDHH receives funds collected from the Communications Sales and Use Tax in order to maintain contracts for telecommunications relay services in the Commonwealth and to provide telecommunications related equipment to qualified applicants through the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). Please note, the \$5,000,000 reduction in Special Funds for the second year of the biennium reflects the anticipated cost

savings found in a new telecommunications relay contract effective August 2015. These savings are made possible by the recent elimination of legislative requirements for location and employment levels found in the current contract. Additional revenue for miscellaneous services is collected from candidate fees for participation in the Virginia Quality Assurance Program. These fees cover only a portion of the actual cost of administration of the assessments.

Performance

Performance Highlights

VDDHH has one key performance measure which relates to the critical communication access issue of the provision of sign language interpreters for state agencies and Virginia courts. The bar is set high for this measure. The agency consistently fills more than 98% of all requests, though, in some cases, requests are rescheduled to ensure coverage. To ensure that such a high fill-rate is achieved, the agency actively recruits qualified interpreters to join the contract and maintains contact with non-contracted interpreters as well. The current contract for interpreter services includes a rate differential for services provided in localities in Northern Virginia. As of July 1, 2014, seventy-seven (77) interpreters are on contract with the agency across the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) continues to meet the needs of interpreters seeking credentials, particularly for those who work in public schools. In 2012, the agency began offering the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a credential recognized by the Virginia Department of Education. Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Performance Assessment results continue to be sent to candidates well ahead of the required 90 working day deadline. For the past several years, the average time from assessment date to results has been under 75 working days and in the 4th quarter of Fiscal Year 2014, average time for results was 60 working days. To ensure this level of performance, the agency monitors the performance of the contracted raters who complete the scoring on the assessments and provides re-standardization training as indicated.

In the Technology Service Area, Virginia Relay continues to meet or exceed Federal standards for call answer rate. In Fiscal Year 2014, 98.54% of all calls were answered in less than 10 seconds. In the Technology Assistance Program (TAP), 96% of the 1244 consumers who received equipment in Fiscal Year 2014 reported a significant improvement in telecommunications accessibility.

Selected Measures

Measure ID	Measure	Alternative Name	Estimated Trend
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Key Risk Factors

VDDHH faces a number of challenges which may limit our ability to satisfy expectations and achieve our mission.

Of particular concern is the number of VDDHH staff who are at or beyond retirement eligibility. The agency is fortunate to have an experienced staff with excellent credentials. The agency has 9 full-time employees (including an at-will) with an average tenure of more than 16 years per employee. As a result, opportunities for mentoring within the agency are limited, but it is imperative that the agency develop meaningful strategies to replace those who are expected to retire within the next five years.

Consumer expectations of the agency remain high. As advances in technology enhance the opportunities for communications access, both our traditional customer base (including culturally Deaf Virginians) and emerging customer groups (non-native American Sign Language Users who require specialized interpreting services, aging Baby Boomers who are technologically savvy and returning veterans who experience service-related hearing loss) will look to VDDHH to provide access to those technologies.

In the Interpreter Services Program, as more freelance and private sector opportunities open up (the result of video relay and remote interpreting services) paying competitive salaries with benefits, VDDHH is faced with fewer interpreters who choose to contract with the agency. This limits our ability to fill requests from courts or state agencies that have joined on to our contract. In addition, the agency must be prepared to embrace and promote the provision of services through remote interpreting as an optional delivery modality. In addition, as more consumers with minimal language skills, often because they are non-native American Sign Language users, interact with state agencies and Virginia courts, the challenge of locating interpreters who can establish effective communication increases. Often in such situations, a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI – a deaf individual with training and certification as a relay interpreter) is recommended. Unfortunately, outside of the Northern Virginia area, there are no Certified Deaf Interpreters in the Commonwealth.

Finally, and significantly, there continues to be a lack of general awareness about the unique service needs, particularly communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities look to VDDHH to be both a model of access and a promoter of the same. This lack of general awareness is not limited to the private sector. State agencies are often unprepared to serve members of the public who are deaf or hard of hearing, both because of a lack of communications access and a deeper lack of understanding of the unique service needs of these consumers. The risk here is increased by reduced funding for the Outreach program. As Outreach contractors are forced to seek funding from additional resources, it can be expected that their focus on the specific issues identified by VDDHH will be limited.

Agency Statistics

Statistics Summary

The following statistics highlight the extensive efforts of VDDHH to maximize the impact of services. In most cases, these statistics remain stable, however, it must be noted that, as access to high-speed internet expands, the number of traditional relay calls will show a decline as callers turn to internet-based relay services which are unreported to VDDHH. Also, in April 2014, a new Interpreter Services Database was implemented. While future data reports will have increased reliability, the statistics for Fiscal Year 2014 do not include consistent data from the year, particularly as related to multi-date assignments.

Statistics Table

Description	Value
Outreach Contacts	22,383
TAP Devices Distributed	1,224
Traditional Relay Calls (Norton Center)	334,747
CapTel Relay Calls	409,264
Interpreter Services Requests	2,459
VQAS Written Assessments	168
VQAS Performance Assessments	213

Management Discussion

General Information About Ongoing Status of Agency

The focus for VDDHH programs and services must remain on communications access. The following initiatives over the next biennium will be critical to the agency's success:

Succession planning must continue in earnest. Over the next year, the agency will explore options for using two currently unfunded MEL with a view towards management "apprenticeship" opportunities.

As part of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) established a three year pilot program for states to distribute equipment to qualified persons who are deaf-blind. Better known as iCanConnect, VDDHH works cooperatively with the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) to administer the program. As of June 30, 2014, forty-nine Virginians who are deaf-blind have received equipment and training through iCanConnect; another nine applications are in progress.

Since October 2012, VDDHH has effectively served military veterans with hearing or speech disabilities in securing telecommunications devices through our Technology Assistance Program (TAP) Together with the Department of Veterans Services' Wounded Warrior Program, the agency will continue work to reduce the communication barriers for Virginia veterans by allowing them to stay connected with their family, friends and employers.

In response to the ongoing concerns of consumers who are unable to attain communications access in health care settings, VDDHH continues to pursue a multi-faceted approach to increase the provision of qualified interpreters in health care in Virginia. The Statewide Interagency Team (comprising agencies providing direct services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Virginians) is exploring the concept of an Interpreter Pool Fund as a mechanism to increase communication access in private legal and health care settings.

To further ensure the availability of qualified interpreters in a wide range of environments, VDDHH must ensure that VQAS maintains its position as a valid and reliable assessment. To do this, the agency expects to launch new materials for the Performance Assessment in 2015.

Outreach Services are challenged by repeated reductions in funding or shifts in funding which result in an increased focus on activities related to Virginia Relay and the Telecommunications Assistance Program. The agency must continue to seek ways to maximize access to technology and training with limited resources.

Information Technology

VDDHH is a member of the Disability Services Agency (DSA) group with IT planning coordinated by the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). In-scope IT services are provided by VITA/NG. Oversight of in-scope services and "out of scope" IT services and management are provided by IT staff located at DARS. IT projects are planned and implemented across all of the Disability Services Agencies, under the leadership of DARS. In addition to the broader IT projects, VDDHH has successfully transitioned to a new SQL database for the Interpreter Services Program (ISP).

Workforce Development

The nature of services provided by VDDHH makes it critical that the agency consider two separate sets of workforce skills. First, the agency must consider the administrative/management/technical/customer service skills necessary to do the job. These include computer skills, written and oral communication skills, office technology skills, organizational skills, and interpersonal skills. In every instance though, the agency must also consider a second set of workforce skills: those related to providing services to and working in an environment with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This skill set includes sign language skills, knowledge of deaf culture, disability-specific technology skills (e.g. Relay and TTY use).

Each position in the agency is evaluated for the degree to which an individual entering that position must have this second, unique set of skills. Some positions require only minimal familiarity upon hire while others require in-depth knowledge and understanding. The agency generally experiences low turnover, however, at least 5 current employees (including the director and two of the three program managers) are eligible for full retirement or will be in this biennium. Succession planning will be an essential focus over the next two years to ensure continuity of operations. Targeted recruitment has proven helpful in identifying qualified candidates who bring the necessary skill set to the agency but, with limited turnover, opportunities for recruitment are rare. To address the looming "brain drain," the agency is considering options for funding two vacant MEL as developmental/apprentice management positions.

Physical Plant

VDDHH currently participates in the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) lease of office space in the Forest Office Park. This lease, which be up for renewal in 2015, provides the agency with sufficient accessible space for the current needs.
