

2014-16 Strategic Plan

Department for the Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing [751]

Mission

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.

Vision

The vision of VDDHH is a Commonwealth where persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened or deaf-blind can fully participate in all aspects of life without barriers to communication.

Values

Finance

Financial Overview

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. The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening program receives an annual \$100,000 appropriation for a federal special education grant. The program also receives a small annual Special Fund appropriation for the receipt and expenditure of candidate registration fees.

Biennial Budget

	2015 General Fund	2015 Nongeneral Fund	2016 General Fund	2016 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	927,452	10,938,174	927,545	5,938,174
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

(Changes to Initial Appropriation will be 0 when the plan is created. They will change when the plan is updated mid-biennium.)

Customers

Anticipated Changes to Customer Base

Virginia Relay Users: The number of relay calls handled by Virginia Relay has steadily declined since 2004 as internet-based alternatives to traditional relay services (including Captioned Telephone Service, Internet Protocol Relay and Video Relay Services) proliferate. The actual number of users of all relay services continues to increase as this newer technology allows individuals to use services that more fully satisfy their communication needs. For example, native signers of American Sign Language (ASL) may be expected to more actively use internet-based Video Relay rather than the text-based, primarily English language-based traditional relay. Virginia-specific data for the number of users of these alternative relay services is not available.

Technology Assistance Program (TAP) Recipients: The population base in the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) continues to shift as more persons who are hard of hearing, many of whom are veterans and older Virginians, learn about and participate in the program. This trend is expected to continue.

Interpreters Seeking Credentials: The number of interpreters seeking credentials through the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Program (VQAS) should remain stable. It is possible that, as candidates choose to take both the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) and the VQAS Performance Assessment, the actual number of assessments administered may rise slightly.

Consumers who are Deaf Or Hard of Hearing: One notable area of anticipated change is the number of non-native American Sign Language (ASL) users who seek services from the agency, particularly those who require interpreter services. There has been an increase in requests from courts in the past year seeking interpreters of sign languages other than ASL. Also, in late FY14, the agency implemented a new database which may affect future reporting on the number of consumers who participate in interpreter services assignments.

Current Customer List

Predefined Group	User Defined Group	Number Served Annually	Potential Number of Annual Customers	Projected Customer Trend
------------------	--------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------

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	Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing (assumes 1 consumer in each completed interpreter request)	2,127	800,000	Stable
Consumer	Technology Assistance Program (TAP) recipients	1,098	800,000	Increase
Consumer	Virginia Relay Users	49,379	800,000	Stable
General Assembly	Legislators	140	140	Stable
State Agency(s)	State Agencies	66	113	Increase
State Agency(s)	Virginia Courts	158	184	Stable
Taxpayer	Advisory Board Members	7	9	Stable

Partners

Name	Description
Contracted Virginia Relay Providers	Provide telecommunications relay service under contract with the state
Contracted and Court Qualified Interpreters	VDDHH contracts with qualified interpreters to provide interpreting services for state agencies who are also on the contract. In addition, the agency works with court-qualified interpreters who are not required to contract.
Contracted Outreach Providers	VDDHH contracts with local agencies to provide training, technical assistance, information and referral and other services on a local or regional basis.
Technology Vendors	Provide new assistive technology and state-of-the-art devices for testing, evaluation, and possible acceptance as TAP L2O equipment offerings.
Contracted Raters and Diagnosticians	VDDHH contracts with qualified individuals to provide rating services (reviewing and scoring VQAS candidate performance assessments) and detailed diagnostic analysis.
Statewide Interagency Team Members (SIT)	VDDHH leads a team of representatives from the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) and the Community Services Boards (CSBs) to address cross-agency concerns about services provided to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind.

Agency Goals

- **Enhance the quality of communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in Virginia by increasing the availability and effectiveness of and consumer access to assistive technology and technology services.**

Summary and Alignment

Technology presents the greatest opportunity for communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. With widespread access to and awareness of effective technology, Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to improve their economic standing, achieve higher levels of educational attainment, and maintain a higher sense of safety, security, and independence.

Objectives

- » **Provide the citizens of the Commonwealth with access to appropriate and effective telecommunications relay services and specialized assistive technology.**

Description

The Technology Programs Service Area is composed of two programs providing access to telecommunication services and related assistive technology for Virginia citizens. The first program, Virginia Relay, is a federally-mandated telecommunications relay service for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or speech disabled. As the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) certified relay oversight agency for the Commonwealth, the agency submits separate monthly, semiannual, and annual reports on usage and performance data. The current FCC relay service standard requirement is 85% of all incoming calls be answered in 10 seconds. The second of these two programs is the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) that provides technical and financial assistance for adaptive communications devices to persons with a hearing loss or speech disability. In FY 2009, the processes for application and receipt of equipment were revised to a loan-to-own (L2O) basis, where an approved applicant receives equipment on a 30-day trial basis. In FY2013, the program was expanded to include the administration of the federal iCanConnect equipment grant program for persons who are deaf-blind. That same year, VDDHH relaxed the TAP/L2O program qualifications for Virginia Veterans with documentation of an honorable discharge. L2O continues to be an effective and efficient process and includes a survey instrument to measure the effectiveness of the equipment received as well as the recipient's level of satisfaction with the program.

Objective Strategies

- Monitor relay contractor performance on a daily basis for both the traditional relay and captioned telephone VITA contracts to ensure compliance with federal requirements and state service level agreements.
- Report relay contractor performance and relay user complaints to the FCC on a semi-annual basis to maintain VDDHH's FCC certification as the Commonwealth's relay oversight agency.
- Conduct annual quality assurance screening on relay contractor performance to monitor vendor compliance with federal relay minimum standards.
- Continue distribution of the TAP/L2O Customer Satisfaction Survey to document the satisfaction level of recipients with equipment's ability to improve telecommunications access.
- Provide VDDHH Outreach contractors and staff with semi-annual updates and training on both relay changes and TAP revisions and initiatives.
- Conduct annual consumer focus groups to evaluate new technology for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, and late-deafened, using feedback to make decisions on adding new technology and devices to the TAP/L2O program.
- Expand current TAP/L2O offerings to include wireless/smart devices in recognition of customer preferences and cost effectiveness.
- Continue marketing of the Virginia Relay CapTel program to senior organizations and the Area Associations on Aging Meals on Wheels program.
- Expand marketing of VDDHH Technology Programs to audiologists and hearing aid dealers.
- In cooperation with Hamilton Relay's Heroes with Hearing Loss program, renew marketing efforts targeting Veterans with a hearing or speech loss.

Measures

- ◆ The average cost of equipment provided per participant in the Technology Assistance Program.

• **Strengthen the culture of preparedness, as related to our customers needs, of state agencies and local governments across the Commonwealth.**

Summary and Alignment

This goal ensures compliance with federal and state regulations, policies and procedures for Commonwealth preparedness. In collaboration with all of the Agencies in the Secretariat for Health and Human Resources and the Virginia Department for Emergency Management, The agency will provide information, training, and guidance for inclusiveness in all phases of emergency preparedness for Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Objectives

- » **Ensure the full inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing (and all disabilities) in all areas of emergency management.**

Description

Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing, deafblind, or speech-impaired must be fully included in all phases of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery operations from emergencies and disasters. With equal access to up-to-date information, via appropriate accommodations, Virginians with functional needs will be able to make informed decisions regarding preparedness, sheltering-in-place or evacuation, and recovery activities. This will allow all Virginians to maintain a higher sense of safety and independence.

Objective Strategies

- Develop and deliver, or coordinate accommodations for, programs that inform Virginians with any disability about emergency preparedness. These activities include, but are not limited to, signed and captioned press conferences, captioned news broadcasts, and live presentations that are both signed and captioned.
- Partner with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management to train local coordinators to develop all-inclusive emergency operations plans.
- Partner with the Virginia Department of Health to provide training to specific groups (i.e. Home Health Care) by participating in Community Based Emergency Response Seminars (CBERS) about emergency preparedness activities.
- Post up-to-date information about emergencies and disasters on the VDDHH Facebook page. Maintain signed and captioned videos

relating to a variety of emergency preparedness topics on the VDDHH Webpage.

- Provide the Virginia Department of Emergency Management with a monthly list of interpreters who are available to assist when an emergency is declared.

Measures

- ◆ The number of qualified interpreters available to assist the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and local emergency management agencies when an emergency is declared.

• Increase the availability, quality and utilization of communication facilitators (interpreters and Communication Access Real Time Translation or CART providers)

Summary and Alignment

With adequate training opportunities and enhanced Quality Assurance Screening access, sign language interpreters in Virginia should be able to meet the demand for services in a changing marketplace (including video relay, remote interpreting and traditional interpreting situations). In addition, with increased community and agency awareness of the levels of participation which can be achieved with appropriate utilization of interpreters and Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) providers, consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing should be able to access employment, community activities, health care, education, and a wide array of other public and private activities.

Objectives

» Increase the pool of qualified interpreters available to fill assignments coordinated by VDDHH.

Description

The number of certified and qualified interpreters who contract with the agency, while rising, is still lower than hoped for. This objective seeks to identify opportunities to increase the number of interpreters who will contract with the agency and the number who will accept court assignments.

Objective Strategies

- Establish a workgroup of interpreters from each region of the state to discuss ways to improve the current contract for interpreting services.
- Annually, contact all Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certified interpreters in the Commonwealth to encourage them to participate in the contract with VDDHH or to be included on the email distribution list of non-contract interpreters for times when a contracted interpreter is not available.
- Encourage all Virginia Quality Assurance Screening candidates who achieve a level II or higher to contract with the agency.

Measures

- ◆ Percentage of all Sign Language Interpreter and CART services requests filled.
- ◆ Percentage of returning Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Candidates whose survey responses indicate they used feedback from their Diagnostic Feedback Report to improve their Performance Assessment Scores.

» Ensure and improve the validity, reliability and efficiency of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Process.

Description

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) provides the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program for sign language interpreters and cued speech transliterators. This program consists of the Written Assessment which must be passed at a 90% rate before a candidate may participate in the Performance Assessment. Performance Assessments are reviewed by trained "raters" who score the performance based on strict criteria and further reviewed by a qualified diagnostician who provides detailed diagnostic feedback on areas of strength and weakness, along with suggestions for improvement. This objective seeks to continue review and improvement of the VQAS System and ensure the ongoing validity and reliability of the VQAS.

Objective Strategies

- Increase the pool of questions available for the Written assessment to ensure test variation;
- Increase the number of Performance Assessment materials available by filming new segments, conducting standardization training and field testing;
- Recruit and train more raters and diagnosticians

Measures

- ◆ Percentage of returning Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Candidates whose survey responses indicate they used feedback from their Diagnostic Feedback Report to improve their Performance Assessment Scores.

• **Strive for recognition of communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing as a core component of all services provided by agencies of the Commonwealth.**

Summary and Alignment

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) is authorized, in the Code of Virginia, to provide a framework of consultation and cooperation among agencies and institutions serving people who are deaf or hard of hearing and to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to this population. While the agency has done this through participation in interagency workgroups and policy reviews upon request, there is an increasing call from consumers for assistance in achieving acceptable levels of access in a broad range of government services and VDDHH must actively inform and assist all state agencies and their local counterparts in understanding and meeting the service needs of these consumers.

Objectives

» **Increase the pool of qualified interpreters available to fill assignments coordinated by VDDHH.**

Description

The number of certified and qualified interpreters who contract with the agency, while rising, is still lower than hoped for. This objective seeks to identify opportunities to increase the number of interpreters who will contract with the agency and the number who will accept court assignments.

Objective Strategies

- Establish a workgroup of interpreters from each region of the state to discuss ways to improve the current contract for interpreting services.
- Annually, contact all Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certified interpreters in the Commonwealth to encourage them to participate in the contract with VDDHH or to be included on the email distribution list of non-contract interpreters for times when a contracted interpreter is not available.
- Encourage all Virginia Quality Assurance Screening candidates who achieve a level II or higher to contract with the agency.

Measures

- ◆ Percentage of all Sign Language Interpreter and CART services requests filled.
- ◆ Percentage of returning Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Candidates whose survey responses indicate they used feedback from their Diagnostic Feedback Report to improve their Performance Assessment Scores.

• **Serve as a recognized and reliable source of current information from state/national resources provided to all customers through a variety of means.**

Summary and Alignment

With a wide and diverse customer base seeking current and critical information, the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing must be prepared to serve as an up-to-date and reliable resource providing information in a variety of formats and through a range of channels, including training programs, the Internet, with attention to social media, and others.

Objectives

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.

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.

Staffing

Authorized Maximum Employment Level (MEL)	11
Salaried Employees	9
Wage Employees	2
Contracted Employees	0

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.

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).

Estimate of Technology Funding Needs

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.

Supporting Documents

Title

Organizational Chart (January 2014)

State Interagency Team Needs Assessment Executive Summary

File Type

MS Excel Spreadsheet

MS Word Document

Technology Services for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing [45004]

Description of this Program / Service Area

This service area provides access to telecommunication services and assistive technology for Virginia citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or speech disabled. The service area comprises two agency programs, Virginia Relay and the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). Direct services include:

- Oversight of federally-mandated Telecommunication Relay Services;
- Administration of the Commonwealth's Telecommunications Relay Services Fund contracts;
- Financial assistance for purchase of telecommunication-related assistive devices for qualified applicants; and
- Technical assistance for and demonstration of devices for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled.

Mission Alignment

This service area directly aligns with the agency's mission of reducing communication barriers through the use of technology services and assistive devices.

Products and Services

Description of Major Products and Services

Technology Assistance Program (TAP) – The VDDHH equipment distribution program (TAP) provides assistive devices, primarily for telecommunications purposes, to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired either at no or a discounted cost. Eligibility is based on verification of disability, income, and residency. There are no age restrictions. After pre-screening, qualified applicants are loaned equipment for a period of 30 days to evaluate its ability to restore communications access; if successful, the equipment is assigned to the applicant. Devices available include text telephones (TTYs), large print TTYs, telephone amplifiers, Voice Carry Over and Captioned Phones, Hearing Carry Over phones, and visual, tactile, and audible signalers. In addition, special order equipment is available on a case-by-case basis.

Virginia Relay Oversight - Virginia Code § 51.5-115 establishes VDDHH as the oversight agency for the operation of telecommunications relay services in the Commonwealth. Currently, oversight responsibilities are for basic relay services including those for persons with a speech disability. Since the original Code language was written, relay-based technology has mushroomed and many new relay services are now available. These services, including but not limited to internet relay, video relay, Spanish relay, and remote text messaging relay, are now readily available to deaf and hard of hearing citizens nationwide. These new services are currently provided from national relay centers and are largely supported by a federal universal services fund. While VDDHH retains Code authority for the oversight of basic relay services such as TTY-based and captioned telephone relay services, consumers consider the agency as a primary resource for information, referral, equipment and training on all types of relay services, including those provided on a national basis.

Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC) - The Council assists VDDHH with the oversight of the current relay contracts and serves as a consumer-based focus group for development and testing of new relay features and services. Expenses for VRAC meetings are supported by Special Funds. The success of the VRAC has been due in large part to the diversity of its membership and their representation of a cross-section of relay users. Council members include representatives from the Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD), a Virginia Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA), the Virginia Association of Deaf Blind (VADB), a Center for Independent Living (CIL), and the Speech and Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV). Council members also include a captioned telephone relay user, a user of Speech to Speech relay, a Video Relay user, an internet-relay user, and two hearing individuals that regularly use Virginia Relay. In addition to these members, representatives from VDDHH and the current relay contractors also participate in the Council meetings as non-voting members. VRAC members and the groups they represent serve as the principal source of consumer feedback on relay service quality, development of new features, and technical assistance activities.

Anticipated Changes

Technology Assistance Program (TAP)

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. With the pilot ending in June of 2015, the FCC is currently preparing associated regulations to continue grant funding. Since the beginning of the program, both VDDHH and DBVI have struggled to identify adequate staffing resources and internal technical expertise to administer the grant. During the final year of the pilot, both agencies will be developing strategies to continue the program into the future or determine if subcontracting the grant activities with a private entity is more efficient.

Virginia Relay Oversight

Since 2004, the total number of all types of relay minutes initiated in Virginia has steadily increased. Since 2010, the number of traditional TTY-based relay minutes has decreased by over 51%. This trend is consistent across the nation and reflects the relay consumer's preference for faster, more efficient internet-based or wireless relay services.

For the first time in its ten year history, captioned telephone relay usage surpassed the usage of traditional relay services in Virginia. This trend is expected to continue and, as a result, VDDHH will re-evaluate outreach efforts and use of promotional resources.

In 2012, VDDHH began offering Speech-to-Speech (STS) relay with a video assist option for persons with speech disabilities.. The enhanced form of STS enables the communications assistant to use visual cues and facial expressions to increase understanding and overall success of the call. The promotion of this new feature and the refocus on STS is expected to increase the number speech-disabled users accessing Virginia Relay.

Factors Impacting

Technology Assistance Program

Many of the devices provided through TAP are designed to operate on traditional, analog phone services. More and more individuals, businesses, and other locations are upgrading their phone service to bundled, internet or server-based high-speed lines. This is particularly true in assistive-living or skilled nursing facilities. Consumers are often confused by this issue and complicate the appropriate selection of equipment from the TAP program. In response to the concerns of state equipment programs and national consumer groups, the Federal Communications Commission is currently investigating this incompatibility issue.

Virginia Relay Oversight

In late 2013, AT&T announced their intent to exist the relay industry during the summer of 2015. Prior to issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to seek a new relay contract, the 2014 General Assembly revised the budget language relaxing the location and employment level requirements. These changes are anticipated to save the Commonwealth up to \$5,000,000 annually beginning in fiscal year 2016.

A second contract for captioning telephone relay services (CapTel) has been extended through early 2015 with options to extend through March of 2018. CapTel relay is targeted to seniors with mild to moderate hearing loss and is currently the fastest growing form of telecommunications relay services. VDDHH plans to promote the popular service through Virginia’s Area Agencies on Aging network in fiscal year 2015.

Additional promotional activities for captioning telephones and other assistive technology are planned for fiscal years 2015 and 2016. These campaigns include targeting audiologists, hearing aid dealers, and veterans with hearing loss.

Financial Overview

Of the Non-General Funds for VDDHH Technology Programs in FY 15, \$10,385,162 is appropriated for the administration, oversight, and contracted operations of Virginia Relay. The remaining \$434,064 is appropriated for the administration and distribution of related assistive technology devices. In FY 16, the \$5,000,000 reduction in Non-General Funds 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.

Biennial Budget

	2015 General Fund	2015 Nongeneral Fund	2016 General Fund	2016 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	0	10,819,226	0	5,819,226
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

Supporting Documents

Title	File Type
iCanConnect Grant Awardyyyy	MS Word Document

Consumer, Interpreter, and Community Support Services [45005]

Description of this Program / Service Area

This service area provides communication access and community support services for Virginia citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, their families and the professionals who serve them. The service area is composed of four agency programs: Interpreter Referral; Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS); Outreach; and, Information and Referral (I&R). Direct services include:

- Scheduling of qualified sign language interpreters for courts and state agencies,
- Limited provision of interpreters for situations not covered by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act,
- Maintenance and distribution of the Virginia Directory of Qualified Interpreters, both on-line and in print,
- An assessment and diagnostics program for the evaluation of the skill level of sign language interpreters,
- Regional technical assistance and local training on assistive devices, adapting to and prevention of hearing loss, use of interpreters, orientation to deafness, and communications access in emergency situations, and
- Information and referral materials on all aspects of communication access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Mission Alignment

This service area directly aligns with the agency's mission of reducing communication barriers through community awareness and the identification and referral of sign language interpreters.

Products and Services

Description of Major Products and Services

Virginia Quality Assurance Screening – The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) provides a program of Quality Assurance Screening for sign language interpreters and cued speech transliterators. This program consists of the Written Assessment which must be passed before a candidate may participate in the Performance Assessment. Performance Assessments are reviewed by trained “raters” who score the performance based on strict criteria and further reviewed by a qualified diagnostician who provides detailed diagnostic feedback on areas of strength and weakness, along with suggestions for improvement. Since 2012, VQAS has also been an authorized administrator of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a national assessment accepted by the Virginia Department of Education as a credential for classroom interpreters.

Interpreter Services Coordination – VDDHH coordinates requests for interpreter services and Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) from state agencies and courts. The agency has established a contract for interpreter services, which other state agencies may join. The agency also coordinates interpreters for 12-step programs and other activities on a very limited basis. In statewide and local emergency situations, the Department provides Emergency Management officials with information about interpreters available to assist in shelters and other critical areas.

Outreach – The Outreach Program is an integral part of all other VDDHH programs. Outreach staff and contractors are the “face” of VDDHH to most customers, and are often the first point of contact for deaf and hard of hearing customers .

- Training – Training is a component of every Service Area at VDDHH. Provided primarily through Outreach staff and contractors, topics include use of assistive technology, how to use and acquire a qualified sign language interpreter, availability of services from other state and local agencies, and appropriate procedures in an emergency or law enforcement situation. Other topics include adapting to hearing loss, understanding educational options and services, learning sign language, as well as conducting specialized trainings to hospital staff, courts, and Public Safety Answering Points (9-1-1 dispatchers). Additionally, Outreach provides technology demonstrations and resource information at a wide variety of community activities, including Health Fairs, Transition (post high school to higher education or employment), community-sponsored events, and civic group and school presentations. Training in Emergency Preparedness will continue, centered on the “Ready Virginia” theme of ‘Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Stay Informed’; through live presentations, the VDDHH Website, and the VDDHH Facebook page.
- Information and Referral – The agency provides information and referral to connect citizens, agencies and private entities with resources on topics related to deafness and hearing loss, through Outreach Services, our website (www.vddhh.org), the Technology Assistance Program (TAP), and Interpreter Services.
- Individualized Problem Resolution – Outreach Contractors provide Individualized Problem Resolution services for consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are having difficulty resolving issues as a direct result of their hearing loss, usually due to a lack of communications access. Problems addressed through this service might include hearing aid funding information, housing, employment, utilities, billing issues and other challenges of daily living.

Directory of Qualified Interpreters – The agency publishes (hard copy and electronic) a Directory of Qualified Interpreters which provides contact information on interpreters who meet or exceed the Code definition of “qualified interpreter.” This directory is available to assist private entities in locating qualified interpreters for events involving consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Anticipated Changes

Ongoing efforts to enhance the administration of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program will include the development and

implementation of new assessment materials, with field testing and standardization of those materials expected in early 2015.

The agency must continue to explore options for providing more interpreting services via remote access, either through the use of broadband or, for courts, ISDN video connections. Also, it is expected that the program will continue to receive requests for interpreters for non-native American Sign Language Users.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Supreme Court of Virginia for the provision of communications access in courts has not been updated since 2007. Negotiations with the Office of the Executive Secretary are in progress and VDDHH hopes to have an updated MOU in place by 2015.

Outreach Services will continue to focus heavily on Virginia Relay and Technology Assistance Program (TAP) awareness and services. Budget cuts have forced Outreach Contractors to seek alternative funding to meet local community needs and limit the ability of those providers to focus on VDDHH-related services.

Outreach Services will also continue to incorporate the use of social media and other electronic/internet based methods for reaching a broad range of consumers with information in emergency situations. The agency anticipates continued focus on emergency preparedness issues for consumers in response to consumer feedback provided.

Factors Impacting

Among the most critical assignments coordinated in the Interpreter Services Program are requests from Virginia Courts. The availability of highly qualified court interpreters varies significantly across the state and, in some areas, interpreters with the most appropriate certification for critical court cases must travel two hours or more each way in order to provide services. Contract and court rates for interpreters have remained at the same level for at least 8 years and, with increasing competition for services from private agencies, VDDHH must consider a rate increase in the current biennium.

Over the past two years, there has been an increase in requests for Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs - native Deaf American Sign Language users trained and certified as relay interpreters). With only a handful of CDIs in the Northern Virginia area and none in other parts of the state, such requests create a challenge.

Demand for interpreters for twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous can vary greatly from year-to-year, making it difficult to effectively plan for the provision of this service. Currently, the agency is able to pay for one interpreted meeting per consumer per week. Generally speaking, particularly during the early stages of recovery, an addict should attend daily meetings. In addition to the funding limitations in this area, the number of interpreters who are able and willing to interpret for 12-step meetings is limited.

The agency's Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program is most significantly impacted by the Department of Education's (DOE) Special Education regulations, which establish VQAS Level III as the minimum professional standard for educational interpreters. Educational interpreters comprise as much as 90% of the candidate pool in VQAS and many of these individuals do not have the skill level necessary to meet the standard. In addition, VDDHH has become a test administrator for the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a national assessment for educational interpreters also recognized by DOE. The addition of the EIPA option has not significantly impacted the number of individuals taking the VQAS Performance Assessment.

Recognizing that nearly 90% of VQAS candidates have been educational interpreters, the Department of Education provides grant funding to support the VQAS program.

VDDHH Outreach Specialists are the "front line" for providing services to Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing. Outreach is continually challenged to provide these services as the current level of contract funding provides only part-time Outreach Specialists for most of the Commonwealth. With services provided by these contractors and two full-time VDDHH staff members, coverage for each encompasses huge geographic and/or populous areas and often requires extensive travel. This results in an on-going challenge to reach consumers who seek the agency's services in an appropriate and timely manner. With virtually no funds for advertising or promotion beyond Virginia Relay activities, the agency is challenged in reaching consumers who may not be familiar with VDDHH programs and services. In many cases, participation in health fairs and presentations at residential facilities serve as the primary avenue for reaching those unfamiliar with the agency. Social media is effective for reaching younger consumers about upcoming events and items of interest, while traditional methods of Outreach are necessary to reach seniors and others who are not internet-connected.

VDDHH does not have enforcement authority and the success of efforts to educate private providers (including legal and medical professionals and media outlets) about critical communications access issues is limited by outside factors. In addition, we are limited in our ability to contact private medical providers to assist in meeting the communication needs of deaf patients because of health privacy laws. Further, many state agencies are reluctant to commit funds to the provision of effective communication services and, when faced with a request for interpreter services or Communications Access Real Time Translation (CART), balk at the costs, particularly for all-day or multi-day events.

Financial Overview

Of the total annual General Fund Appropriations, \$299,278 provides support for Community Support Services (VDDHH Outreach), \$196,324 provides support for the Interpreter Services program, with the remaining \$142,457 for the administration of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program. VQAS also receives up to \$18,948 in Special Revenue Appropriations for the receipt and expenditure of candidate registration fees, as well as up to \$100,000 Federal Appropriation for the administration of a federal IDEA grant for the rating and diagnostics of

sign language interpreters/candidates.

Biennial Budget

	2015 General Fund	2015 Nongeneral Fund	2016 General Fund	2016 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	538,059	118,948	538,059	118,948
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

Supporting Documents

Title	File Type
Memorandum Of Understanding with the Supreme Court of Virginia	MS Word Document
Interpreter Services Contract (through December 2015)	MS Word Document

Administrative Services [45006]

Description of this Program / Service Area

This service area provides oversight, policy and procedural guidance, and administrative and operational support to all of the agency’s programs and services as well as support for the Advisory Board.

Mission Alignment

Administrative Services supports the agency's mission by providing overall policy guidance to ensure that the agency's other service areas function efficiently and in an environment focused on superior customer service and accountability.

Products and Services

Description of Major Products and Services

Advisory Board Support - The agency provides staff support to the gubernatorially appointed advisory board. Support includes research, training, policy guidance, logistics and administrative support.

Legislative Updates - The agency tracks legislative activity and provides timely updates on legislation affecting persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Legislative Liaison Services - VDDHH provides legislative analysis and expert testimony on bills related to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Regulatory Coordination - The agency maintains regulations for public participation, TAP and Interpreter Programs.

Interagency Program and Policy Guidance - In order to ensure that programs and services of the Commonwealth address communications access issues and other concerns of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, VDDHH staff often serve on work groups, task forces, and planning groups for state agencies.

Agency Program Support - Administrative Services provides general guidance and administrative support to all agency programs. This include policy development, publications, and website coordination.

Anticipated Changes

Agency regulations need to be updated in the very near future to reflect changes in program administration and technology. None of the proposed changes are expected to be controversial.

Factors Impacting

VDDHH operates with limited staff, each of whom has multiple responsibilities. This reality significantly impacts our ability to effectively respond to emerging issues while maintaining a high level of customer service satisfaction.

With several staff members at or beyond eligibility for full retirement and few opportunities for meaningful succession planning, the agency has concerns about meeting demands for service in the future.

Financial Overview

Of the annual General Fund Appropriation, \$45,654 is paid to the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services for the provision of administrative and back-office functions as outlined in our Memorandum of Understanding. An additional \$30,000 is budgeted for direct payment for VITA services. The remaining appropriation is for the oversight, guidance and operational support to all agency programs.

Biennial Budget

	2015 General Fund	2015 Nongeneral Fund	2016 General Fund	2016 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	389,393	0	389,486	0
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

Supporting Documents

Title	File Type
Disability Services Agencies Memorandum Of Understandingyyyy	Adobe PDF