

Agency Strategic Plan

Department for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

Agency Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission Statement:

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) works to reduce the communication barriers between persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who are hearing, including family members, service providers, and the general public.

Agency Vision:

We see VDDHH as a national model for state level services and a widely known resource in Virginia for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. This model includes a variety of programs, including Technology Assistance, Virginia Relay, Interpreter Services, Virginia Quality Assurance Screening, Outreach Services and Library Services, which are designed to ensure widespread communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. To achieve this, VDDHH ensures that every customer who comes into contact with the agency is provided with services, resources, or information to address their needs. VDDHH models communication access by operating in an environment where the customer's communication needs are addressed immediately and consistently. VDDHH is the first source for Virginians seeking information related to hearing loss, whether as a consumer, a family member, a professional in a related field or a business person. Consumers know that VDDHH will have information on and access to the most current and effective assistive technology to meet their needs and that the agency will provide information and assistance for those who need it to access that technology. VA Relay continues to be a national model for telecommunications relay services, monitoring consumer needs and technological advances and initiating or responding to industry developments in a timely manner. VDDHH maintains a wide variety of partnerships with public and private entities to build awareness of and responsiveness to the communication access needs of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. VDDHH provides opportunities for every state and local agency, business, law enforcement agency, emergency services agency, health care provider, and interested citizen to receive training or have access to information on communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. With leadership from VDDHH, Virginia is home to an adequate supply of qualified sign language interpreters and transliterators who have access to necessary training to build and enhance their skills. These interpreters participate in Virginia Quality Assurance Screening, demonstrating progressive skill development as they move toward national certification.

Agency Values:

- **Communications Access**
Ensuring communications access for all of our customers and in all state programs and services.
- **Respect**
Respecting the needs and choices of all of our customers.
- **Making a Difference**
Believing that everything we do can make a difference in the life of one person or many people.
- **Responsive**
Being responsive to the concerns and issues raised by all of our customers.
- **Problem Resolution**
Committing to real and meaningful problem resolution.
- **Customer Service**
Providing the highest level of customer service.
- **Individual and Family Impact**
Recognizing the impact that hearing loss/deafness can have on individuals and their families.
- **Valued Employees**
Appreciating the diversity and skills of every member of our staff.
- **Strong Partnerships**
Building relationships with other agencies in the Commonwealth with contractors (including Outreach

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technology vendors, interpreters, and relay providers) and recognizing these relationships as beneficial for the agency, the partner, and the customer.

Agency Executive Progress Report

Current Service Performance

VDDHH has relied on our Executive Agreement Objectives, Performance Measures and Customer Feedback to assess our current service performance.

In Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS), the agency has aimed at improving the effectiveness of the diagnostic feedback provided to candidates who participate in the Performance Assessment. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of those who completed the survey in 2004 indicated that they would seek or had sought additional training based on the diagnostic feedback they received. The agency continues to exceed targets for the percentage of VQAS candidates registering on-line, with 83% of candidates in 2005 doing so. The agency has also targeted increased candidate access to the assessment process by the provision of on-line Written Assessments. The availability of this has been delayed until January 2006 because of software incompatibility and security issues.

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Program has 15 screening slots available in the Performance Assessment each month. As of July 1, 2005, all slots were full through October 2005 and there are no candidates who wish to take the assessment who are waiting for a screening slot.

Customers in Library Services, TAP, and VQAS routinely receive customer service surveys which reveal very high (95% or higher) satisfaction with the services provided.

The agency has met our objectives to respond to customer feedback by implementing a minimum of 5 program enhancements annually (newsletter revived, TAP application/brochure revamped, purchased library materials on DVD, expanded Video Relay room, and revised TAP coupon/award letter to be more customer friendly in 2005).

At the end of FY 2005, the Technology Assistance Program had a waiting list of 173 individuals who were qualified to receive equipment at no cost through the program. This waiting list was the result of demand for program equipment exceeding available funds. The agency plans to use additional funding provided in the FY 2006 Appropriations Act to clear the current waiting list and to implement new policies to minimize the need for waiting lists in the future.

We have exceeded our stated objective of reducing by 10% the number of emergency calls from deaf and hard of hearing consumers received by Virginia Relay. In fact, during the first year of the targeted training effort, Virginia Relay reports a reduction of 35% in this type of call. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of all Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs or 911 centers) in Virginia have received training from VDDHH Outreach contractors this year.

Virginia Relay also documented an increase of 62% in customer commendations between FY 2004 and FY 2005. In fact, 225 customer commendations were received during the year, sharply contrasting the 14 complaints received during the same period. Another Relay-related service performance goal was to increase voice-initiated relay calls by 5% by the end of FY2004. The actual increase by that date was 6%, with an additional 9% increase in FY2005.

The agency has documented the incorporation of 3 relay enhancements or TAP devices in the past year. These include VA Relay Text Messaging, CapTel Devices in TAP, and Video Relay Demonstration Centers in 19 locations across the state. This exceeds our annual target of two (2) such enhancements or additions.

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The agency has consistently met or exceeded targets for increased number of relay calls, the number of public entities using interpreter services for the first time, and the number of Area Agencies on Aging receiving training on VDDHH programs and services.

The agency has fostered a number of efforts to increase communications access in health care situations, including hosting a demonstration of remote interpreting services for health care providers.

Productivity

With 14 authorized FTEs, VDDHH currently relies upon 11 full-time staff members (FTEs), 2 wage employees, and 6 contracted agencies employing 15 Outreach Specialists statewide. The agency has 2 vacant FTE positions. An additional MEL is transferred to the Department of Rehabilitative Services on an annual basis as part of our Memorandum of Agreement for provision of back-office/administrative functions.

In 1996, the agency turned from an FTE-based Outreach Services Program to a contract-centered program. The result of this fundamental shift in service delivery has been a dramatic increase in services statewide. In 1996, the agency documented 8306 Outreach contacts across the Commonwealth. By 2001, documented Outreach contacts had risen to 91,814. In the first three quarters of 2005, 141,037 such contacts occurred. (note: Library Services are included in this count of Outreach Services.)

In 2005, 401 candidates were screened in the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening program. Candidates participating in the Written Assessment receive their results immediately. Candidates who participate in the Performance Assessment receive their results and their diagnostics in an average of 90 working days.

In 2005, the agency coordinated 1640 requests for interpreter services for state courts, state agencies, twelve-step programs and other agencies and organizations. Of these requests, 102 were not filled because no interpreter was available. The agency contracted with 46 interpreters during this period.

The Technology Assistance Program started FY05 with a waiting list of more than 150 individuals. During FY 2005, 1292 individuals were served in TAP, however, the agency had to reinstate the waiting list in April 2005 due to a lack of funds. As of June 30, 2005, 173 individuals were on the TAP Waiting list.

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Major Initiatives and Related Progress

Emerging technology and increasing consumer awareness have fueled a number of key initiatives at VDDHH, including:

- **Captioned Telephone Service and Distribution** of related devices – From April 2004 to March 2005, Captioned Telephones to access Captioned Telephone Service (CapTel) were provided as part of a contract with Sprint. During this period, the agency distributed 600 Captioned Telephones. Since April 2005, the Captioned Telephone equipment has been part of the agency's TAP program and 57 additional phones have been distributed.
- **Relay Partner Program** – This is a major initiative to increase awareness of Virginia Relay by businesses in the Commonwealth. Launched in May 2005, the Relay Partner program provides businesses with training and awareness activities to increase their awareness and use of Virginia Relay. VDDHH is providing information on the program through local chambers of commerce and through general press releases. Since its inception, the Relay Partner program has signed on more than 90 businesses and has established a target of 250 by the end of calendar year 2005.
- **Training on Handling TTY calls for 9-1-1 Centers** – The intent of this initiative was to reduce the number of calls to Virginia Relay which should have been made directly to 9-1-1 centers. The original goal was to reduce such calls by 10%, however, this initiative has exceeded that goal, resulting in a 35% reduction of emergency calls to Virginia Relay.
- **Consumer Access to Emergency Broadcast Information** – The agency led a task force which produced a Best Practices Guide for Communications Access which has become a sought-after model.
- **Improved Access to Virginia Quality Assurance Screening** – The agency has provided access to on-line registration for the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening and is working to develop on-line administration of the Written Assessment, which should be available in January 2006.
- **Partnership with Aging for Insurance Counseling** – VDDHH Outreach Contractors received training on the Virginia Insurance Counseling & Assistance Program (VICAP) in a joint effort with the Department of Aging in March 2005. As a result, Outreach Contractors have been working with local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to provide workshops for consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- **Upgrading Library Services** – A major re-cataloging project is underway in the VDDHH Library. The intent of this activity is to improve access to Library materials in house and to enable access to catalogs on-line.
- **TAP Review** – As part of a year-long review of TAP, the agency has revamped the brochure to provide an innovative and user-friendly file folder for information, simplified the application form, clarified policies, and provided an equipment selection guide.
- **Management Improvements** – Realignment of management responsibilities to strengthen relationship between and program efficiency of Outreach Services and TAP is in process. This is a direct result of our Workforce Development Plan.

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Virginia Ranking and Trends

There are few formal mechanisms which compare or rank state-level services for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, though such data is available for Telecommunications Relay Services, which are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. At least 30 states have some form of office or commission on deafness with responsibilities that extend beyond federally mandated rehabilitative services, but the design, size and authority of these entities varies widely. Products and services offered by VDDHH may be similar (by description) to the products and services available from other state commissions for the deaf and hard of hearing but the fundamental service delivery mechanism is so different as to make comparison impossible. For example, while 41 states offer some form of equipment distribution program, few of these programs can be directly compared to VDDHH TAP which provides limited equipment free or at contract cost to qualified consumers. TAP relies upon General Fund dollars to purchase equipment for consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired, while most other states rely on some form of Universal Services Fund for their equipment distribution programs. Also, in contrast to the VDDHH program, some programs provide equipment vouchers where applicants receive a set dollar amount and choose their equipment from their choice of vendors while others provide long-term loaner equipment without ownership transfer. In addition, eligibility requirements vary widely.

- Virginia Relay, the state's telecommunications relay service located in Norton, currently ranks 12th in the nation for the number of calls handled annually based on data from the National Association of State Relay Administration (NASRA).
- Virginia is home to 151 interpreters certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). By comparison, neighboring states can claim 218 (Maryland), 119 (North Carolina), 78 (Tennessee), 35 (South Carolina), and 20 (West Virginia).

Customer Trends and Coverage

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. Specifically, we know that the Commonwealth has a growing population of older Virginians, many of whom experience hearing loss and who may seek or benefit from our services. Many of these individuals are either reluctant to seek services or are unfamiliar with the availability of our services. This trend also increases the percentage of customers we serve who are hard of hearing, which continues the shift the agency has experienced over the past ten years towards a broader customer base than the Deaf Community. In addition, this customer group actively seeks assistance from the agency in identifying financial aid resources for the purchase of hearing aids.

The agency also anticipates requests for services from several smaller but important segments of the population. There is an increasing number of cochlear implant recipients and the agency needs to prepare to understand the service needs of this population and incorporate those into our programs. Another emerging customer group is families with children identified in Virginia's Newborn Hearing Screening Program in the first few weeks of life. These families and their service providers are expected to seek assistance from the agency for a variety of reasons. The agency has also experienced an increase in requests for services from the growing Hispanic community in the state.

As VDDHH Outreach contractors reach more individuals, families and businesses, and, as the media periodically turns its attention to issues affecting persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, the agency anticipates requests for services from more consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Call volume at the state-contracted Virginia Relay Center in Norton, VA, is expected to decline over the next several years as alternatives, including Internet-based Relay services, increase in popularity. This reduction in call volume at the Relay Center should not be seen as a reduction in the number of Virginians using some form of Relay, as that number is expected to continue to increase as consumers gain access to alternative relay services.

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Future Direction, Expectations, and Priorities

Several major factors are expected to influence VDDHH programs and services in the next several years. A survey of agency customers conducted during the strategic planning process supports these assumptions.

Developments in technology have and should continue to reduce the communication barriers between consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who are not. These same technological advancements will be one of the driving forces behind VDDHH customer expectations and service priorities. Among the developments that the agency anticipates affecting our services are internet-based communications, such as remote CART, cochlear implants, CapTel phones, wireless text messaging, and video relay. The benefits of these developments will be counterbalanced by cost to consumers and their expectations that VDDHH will assist them with the purchase or service costs.

The agency anticipates a growing need for communications access, including qualified interpreters and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) providers in public agencies, courts, schools and remote services (including video relay). The demand for qualified interpreters will further strain the VQAS system which is currently saturated with unprepared candidates. There is a growing call for VDDHH to become a catalyst for the development of interpreter training opportunities. There is also periodic interest in requiring licensing of interpreters and any movement toward this could significantly affect the administration of VQAS. In addition, standards for CART providers are not as widely known or accepted as those for interpreters, and the availability of providers who meet the current standards is limited. VDDHH plans to partner with the National Court Reporters Association to address these issues.

Consumers are also calling on VDDHH to take a more active role in the monitoring and evaluation of state programs and services which should be available to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, particularly in the area of education. While VDDHH has traditionally carried out this duty by responding to concerns on a case-by-case basis and participating in planning groups, we anticipate taking a more active and direct role in addressing this aspect of our charge in the coming years.

Many families, individuals and service providers turn to VDDHH for assistance with the purchase of hearing aids. The agency does not have any resources to provide financial assistance; however we have collected information about available resources which we provide to those seeking these resources. As a partner in many service initiatives for Virginians from newborns to senior citizens, VDDHH is expected to provide meaningful and useful guidance in this area.

In addition to the previously noted Virginia Relay issues related to the need for a new contractor, a number of changes, both administrative (from the Federal Communications Commission and the General Assembly's action on the Telephone Tax Act) and technological, are expected to impact the agency's oversight of Virginia Relay.

Awareness of the needs of Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing in emergency situations has grown since September 11th and Hurricane Isabel. Emergency management agencies need specialized assistance to address these needs in their planning and training programs. Captioning and alternative methods of public alert are also important issues.

The agency also recognizes that information sharing is a key to our success in achieving our mission. We expect to continue to utilize alternative approaches to getting key information to our customers to meet this requirement. This is especially true in the area of financial assistance for the purchase of hearing aids.

As a partner in the Olmstead Planning Process in Virginia, VDDHH is expected to ensure that communications access issues are addressed for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and either in institutions or transitioning to the community.

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VDDHH is also aware of a resolution agreed to by the Virginia Association of the Deaf, one of the leading advocacy organizations in the state, to request that the agency conduct a review of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Program, particularly as it relates to and serves educational interpreters. No details on VAD's goals for this study are available at this time.

Impediments

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

- Through TAP, our customers seek access to assistive devices which represent cutting edge technology, but the agency faces perennial budget shortfalls in this program resulting in waiting lists. The addition of new devices increases the program cost and usually results in new customers which further strains the budget.
- An increased demand for Outreach Services statewide presents the agency with competing priorities – either provide significant one-to-one services directly to consumers or maximize efficiency by targeting Outreach Services to community groups and service providers.
- As more freelance and private sector opportunities open up (the result of video relay and remote interpreting services), VDDHH is faced with fewer interpreters who choose to contract with the agency. This limits our ability to fill requests from state agencies who have joined on to our contract.
- There are limited training opportunities available for interpreters who wish to develop or improve their skills. As a result, many candidates who participate in the VQAS assessments are unprepared to achieve a screening level.
- Lack of general public awareness about communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and the role VDDHH is able to take in assisting with such access.

The greatest challenge we face is based on consumer expectations of our role as an advocacy agency, particularly in the areas of education and ADA enforcement. VDDHH does not have Code authority to provide direct advocacy services nor to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act or any other laws. Our role in the planning and administration of educational programs, particularly the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, is also very limited according to the Code. A recent survey of agency customers reveals that, while there are no programs at the agency that they would like to see reduced in focus, they expect us to increase our focus and involvement with advocacy and education. Unless and until we have the authority and the funding to do these items, we will continue to face expectations which we cannot fulfill.

Agency Background Information

Statutory Authority

The programs and services of VDDHH are authorized in Chapter 13 of Title 51.5 of the Code of Virginia.

This chapter establishes the VDDHH Advisory Board (§51.5-106) and its powers and duties (§51.5-107), including ensuring the development of long-range programs and plans, reviewing and commenting on all budgets and requests for appropriations, and advising the Governor, Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Director and the General Assembly on matters related to Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing.

§51.5-108 continues the Department after recodification while §51.5-109 -110 establishes the Director's position, powers and duties.

§51.5-111 defines persons who are deaf or hard of hearing for purposes of the chapter.

§51.5-112 delineates the powers and duties of the agency to:

- Develop an information program;
- Promote a framework of consultation and cooperation among agencies and institutions serving people who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- Provide training and technical assistance;

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- Monitor and evaluate the provision of services for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- Make appropriate recommendations for legislative changes and monitor federal legislation;
- Cooperate with the schools for the deaf and the blind;
- Operate a program of technology assistance; and
- Adopt necessary regulations.

§51.5-113 establishes the VDDHH Interpreter Services program, the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Program, and the Directory of Qualified Interpreters. This section also defines “qualified interpreter.”

§51.5-114 allows the agency to accept gifts and donations.

In addition to these statutory requirements, VDDHH is authorized, in §37.1-67.5, to coordinate interpreters in commitment hearings, in §8.01-384.1 for civil court and, in § 19.2-164.1, to do the same in criminal court.

§56-484.4-6 defines the role of VDDHH as the agency responsible for the provision and administration of telecommunications relay service in the Commonwealth. Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as codified at 47 U.S.C. § 225 requires all states to provide a telecommunications relay service.

Customer Base:

Customer Description	Served	Potential
Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing	4,924	649,000
Families, professionals and interested parties seeking information (served Unknown, potential unlimited)	0	0
Interpreters Seeking Credentials (VQAS)	401	2,408
Library Patrons	263	1,344
State Agencies	52	133
Technology Assistance Program (TAP) applicants	1,292	649,000
Virginia Courts	165	174
Virginia Relay Users	1,590,491	1,590,491

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Anticipated Changes In Agency Customer Base:

VDDHH does not anticipate a dramatic increase in any particular customer base. We do anticipate that the number of calls handled by Virginia Relay in Norton will continue to decrease as alternatives to traditional relay services (including Internet Protocol Relay and Video Relay Services) proliferate, however, these same alternatives will probably lead to more individuals using Relay services in some form or another. In all other programs and services, we anticipate that the numbers served will remain steady or increase modestly each year.

EXPLANATORY NOTE ABOUT CUSTOMER BASE: All Virginia residents are potentially served through VDDHH's Outreach Services, Virginia Relay, Interpreter Services, and Library Services Programs. As the agency moves towards improved methods of capturing individuals served, we expect that the reported numbers served will increase. At this time, most programs and services in the agency report on activity level and many of the reported activities include multiple customers. While VDDHH does not track actual number of individuals served, we do know that, in FY 2004, agency services recorded a total of 1,760,997 "service contacts" statewide. This reflects 1,590,491 relay calls completed, 1362 interpreter services requests coordinated, 361 VQAS candidate: screened, 5284 TAP services provided (including activities in the TAPLOAN and Demonstration Sites), and 163,499 Outreach and Information and Referral contacts (including Library services provided).

VDDHH does not have reliable data on the number of deaf and hard of hearing Virginians for use in determining our Customer Base. The agency relies upon population projections based on information from the National Center for Health Statistics to provide a general estimate of the number of Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing. The National Center for Health Statistics - National Health Interview Survey estimates that 8.7% of the total population (over age 3) experiences some degree of hearing loss. This includes persons who are born deaf or hard of hearing as well as persons who lose some or all of their hearing later in life. About 1% of the population might be considered to be deaf (severe to profound hearing loss) and 7.7% could be considered hard of hearing. VDDHH has applied these prevalence rates to 2004 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau for Virginia and generally estimates that approximately 649,000 Virginians might experience some degree of hearing loss. These are only estimates based on prevalence rates and have not been independently verified. The agency uses these numbers only to project the greatest possible Customer Base for agency services. There is no data available to project how many of these individuals or their families might be expected to utilize VDDHH programs and services. In addition, the agency does not maintain records which would provide an unduplicated count of individuals served by the agency. For example, one individual might use Virginia Relay every day and access it from a different phone each time and might call to the same number for each call or to different number for each call. (The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulates telecommunications relay services, requires providers to report on relay minutes as opposed to number of calls or number of users.) In the same way, it is difficult to identify the number of customers served by each Interpreter Services request. Such a request might provide services in a one-to-one situation where one hearing person and one deaf person discuss a matter (such as a social services interview situation) or in a many-to-many situation (such as a workshop with a deaf presenter and hearing audience members).

The preceding table includes data on only those customer groups for which VDDHH has identified a base and a record of specific numbers of customers served during FY 2005. For example, Virginia has a finite number of courts and state agencies, all of whom are potential customers of the VDDHH Interpreter Services Program. In addition, the agency has operated two programs with established potential customer bases since at least 1990. The number of potential customers for these programs (VQAS, Library Services) represents the total number of individuals who have registered for these services since their inception. Customers in these programs typically access the programs on an occasional basis, limited either by the customers' needs or programs' regulations. Some of the customers included in the potential count are not expected to access the services again, either because they have left the area, achieved national certification (VQAS candidates) or their interest in the issues the agency addresses has otherwise shifted.

As a result of this Strategic Planning Process, the agency has recognized the need to capture more detailed information about customers served and will address this later in this report.

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Agency Partners:

Contracted Interpreters

Provide sign language interpretation in Virginia courts, state agencies and other service areas.

Contracted Outreach Providers

Provide Information and Referral, training, and technical assistance on the local level.

Contracted Virginia Relay Providers

Provide telecommunication relay service for the Commonwealth.

Contracted VQAS Raters

Provide highly skilled review and rating of VQAS candidate performance assessments.

TAPLOAN Sites

Local service providers and organizations contract (non-financial) with VDDHH to provide TAP equipment available for short-term loan.

Technology Vendors

Provide assistive technology for qualified TAP applicants.

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Agency Products and Services:

Current Products and Services

- **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.
- **Virginia Quality Assurance Screening** – 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.
- **Interpreter Services Coordination** – VDDHH coordinates requests for interpreter services and Computer Assisted Real Time Captioning (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 (such as funerals) on a very limited basis.
- **Technology Assistance Program** – The Technology Assistance Program (TAP) provides assistive devices, primarily for telecommunications purposes, to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired either free or at contract cost. In addition, the TAPLOAN program of TAP, makes similar devices, as well as assistive listening systems, available for loan to consumers, state agencies, and businesses for short-term use. TAP also includes Assistive Device Demonstration Centers at sites around the state to assist individuals in determining the equipment which is best suited to their needs.
- **Library Services** – VDDHH maintains a library of books and videotapes available for loan within the Commonwealth. The collection also includes a range of periodicals and informational materials specifically related to issues affecting persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Utilized by consumers, educators, interpreters, families and other interested individuals, the Library provides a central source of very specific, topical and current information available from no other source in the Commonwealth.
- **Video Relay Services (VRS)** are currently offered on a national level by 8 providers funded through a federal universal services fund. The service is very popular with deaf individuals whose primary language is ASL. Because the use of VRS requires specialized equipment and a high-speed internet connection, VDDHH provides a VRS demonstration room offering consumers access to the major VRS providers. With VDDHH’s assistance, this access enables interested parties to test and select the most appropriate equipment and provider to satisfy their communication needs before committing to purchase or subscription.
- **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).
- **Technical Assistance** – Technical Assistance provided by VDDHH takes on several forms. The agency provides technical assistance to other state agencies and private entities to assist in meeting the communications access needs of consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing. The agency also provides technical assistance through participation in state and local advisory groups, policy making groups, and planning bodies.
- **Legislative Tracking** – The agency monitors legislative activity in the Virginia General Assembly to determine impact on persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The agency provides expert testimony, when needed, and detailed analysis on issues for the Secretary and the Governor. Issues identified as being of interest to the agency or our customers are actively tracked and regular reports are provided to a

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broad network of consumers and professionals.

- **Advisory Board Support** – The agency provides administrative and planning support to the VDDHH Advisory Board.
- **Information and Referral** – The agency provides information and referral to connect citizens, agencies and private entities with resources on topics related to deafness through Outreach Services, our website (www.vddhh.org), Library Services, 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 housing, utilities, billing issues or other challenges of daily living.
- **Virginia Relay Oversight** - VDDHH serves as the oversight agency for the operation of telecommunications relay services in the Commonwealth. In this capacity, VDDHH solicits proposals and manages the resulting contract for telecommunications relay services in the state.

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 often provided from national relay centers and are largely supported by a federal universal services type fund.

While VDDHH retains Code authority for the oversight of basic relay services such as TTY-based and Voice Carry Over (CapTel), consumers consider the agency as a resource for information, referral, equipment and training on all types of relay services, including those provided on a national basis. For purposes of this document, the program VA Relay is defined to include all relay services available to Virginia consumers, not just those provided from the AT&T relay center located in Norton.

Factors Impacting Agency Products and Services

- Advances in technology routinely and significantly impact VDDHH's products and services. Virginia Relay frequently serves as a testing ground for new forms of telecommunications access, including the captioned telephone relay service and text messaging. As Relay-related devices move from conceptual testing to full market availability, the agency will be challenged to determine which ones should appropriately be added to the agency's TAP program as essential tools for communications access.
- Over the past three years, TTY-based relay traffic handled by the Norton center has decreased by approximately 17%. During this same period, total Virginia relay traffic, including internet-based calls, has remained consistent at just under 1.6 million calls per year. In other words, TTY-based relay calls handled at the Norton center are decreasing at a rate equal to the growth in internet-based and enhanced relay services provided on a national level. The FCC recently noted, in its Fourth 706 Report, that, nationwide, consumers used 733,000 Video Relay Service minutes and 4.5 million Internet Protocol minutes on relay calls in 2004. Those figures represent, respectively, a 2,000% increase and a 640% increase over 2002.
- Video Relay Services (VRS) and other internet based relay services are currently funded entirely by a federal universal services fund. The FCC has recently expressed its intent to pass a large portion of these costs on to the states. Based on current usage, the future impact on Virginia could be in excess of \$4,000,000 annually.
- Demand for and access to the services of qualified Interpreters and CART providers is affected by the disparity between consumer awareness of these services (which is high) and service provider of the same (which is limited). In addition, the agency's ability to fill requests for qualified interpreters in Virginia's courts and state agencies may be impacted by the emergence of Video Relay Services. As qualified interpreters migrate to steady jobs with benefits with these services, the supply of freelance interpreters available during the typical business day may be expected to dwindle.

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- The agency's Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program is most significantly impacted by the Department of Education's 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. Provisions in the Special Education regulations allow for waivers for up to three years, during which time candidates repeatedly register for the VQAS. Unfortunately, there are limited interpreter training opportunities available for many of these candidates and few incentives for them to pursue the training that is available. This program will continue to experience high demand for assessment slots as candidates who do not have the necessary skills to achieve a level continue to register for the assessment multiple times in order to maintain employment in the public schools. The program is also impacted by the availability of qualified raters to review and score candidate Performance Assessments. While the agency has a cadre of trained raters, not all of them are active and available when needed.
- Library Services has been impacted by challenges with properly cataloged materials and loss of items due to patron failure to return. The library is staffed by a Library Assistant who is also responsible for back-up receptionist duties as much as 50% of the time. Volunteers play a key role in maintaining the library. Efforts are underway to correct cataloging problems and materials recovery to improve overall library services.
- The General Assembly has been considering legislation to change the way taxes and fees on telephone services are collected. This legislation includes the current Virginia Relay Surcharge collected on every business and residential telephone landline in Virginia. It is not clear what impact such a change would have on VDDHH's oversight of relay. This legislation and other relay-related proposals introduced in 2005 has drawn attention to the budget language which requires Virginia Relay services to be provided from Norton and to include a specified employment level.

Anticipated Changes in Agency Products and Services

- The current AT&T contract for relay services had been expected to be extended through January 2011. However, the recent buyout of AT&T by SBC has resulted in the need for a new Request for Proposals (RFP) for relay services in the Spring of 2006. Retention of the highly qualified Norton-based workforce may be in jeopardy as, historically, no other relay provider except AT&T has bid on a Norton-based contract. Other relay providers appear reluctant to operate a center with a unionized workforce.
- The anticipated availability of the VQAS Written Assessment on-line is expected to improve customer service and to improve the validity and reliability of the test since each test will be a different computer-generated version (currently, the agency has two versions of the test in use).
- Re-cataloging of Library materials should improve customer access to materials and allow the agency to provide up-to-date catalog information on the agency's website in response to requests from patrons.
- A Request for Proposals for Outreach Services in the Fall of 2005 will reflect a change in the agency's delivery of training and technical assistance. New Outreach contracts will include detailed annual training targets in several service areas.

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Agency Financial Resources Summary:

VDDHH’s funding comes primarily from general fund dollars (87%), an annual cash transfer from the State Corporation Commission for our oversight of the VA Relay service (9%), support from the contracted relay provider for outreach support (3%), and candidate registration fees from the VQAS (interpreter skills assessment and diagnostics program) candidates (1%).

	<u>Fiscal Year 2007</u>		<u>Fiscal Year 2008</u>	
	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund
Base Budget	\$1,328,631	\$177,942	\$1,328,631	\$177,942
Changes To Base	\$49,709	\$4,391	\$49,918	\$4,391
AGENCY TOTAL	\$1,378,340	\$182,333	\$1,378,549	\$182,333

Agency Human Resources Summary:

Human Resources Overview

VDDHH currently relies upon 11 full-time staff members (FTEs), 2 wage employees, and 6 contracted agencies employing 15 Outreach specialists statewide. The agency currently has 2 vacant FTE positions. An additional MEL is transferred to the Department of Rehabilitative Services on a annual basis as part of our Memorandum of Agreement for provision of back-office/administrative functions. In addition to a central office in Richmond, the agency maintains an office at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Staunton.

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Position Summary

Effective Date:	7/1/2005
Total Authorized Position level	14
Vacant Positions	2
Non-Classified (Filled).....	1
Full-Time Classified (Filled)	10
Part-Time Classified (Filled)	0
Faculty (Filled)	0
Wage	2
Contract Employees	0
Total Human Resource Level	13

Factors Impacting Human Resources

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. Targeted recruitment has proven helpful in identifying qualified candidates who bring the necessary skill set to the agency.

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Anticipated Changes in Human Resources

The Outreach Manager is scheduled to retire in January 2006. The agency plans to review the position with the intent of combining management of Outreach and Technology Assistance Programs since the two programs work very closely together. The position will be relocated to Richmond. In doing this, the agency expects to seek a local contractor to provide direct Outreach services in the Valley area, possibly based out of the current Staunton facility.

The agency expects to seek funding for one vacant FTE position to achieve the goals of this strategic plan.

Plans are in place to fill the remaining vacant MEL in early FY 2007 as a CapTel Outreach Specialist for promotion of the popular and cost saving VCO relay service. The State Corporation Commission has tentatively agreed to transfer sufficient non-general Funds for the support of the MEL. The corresponding Appropriations will be submitted as a Technical Addendum.

Agency Information Technology Summary:

Current State / Issues

- Since 1995, as part of a consolidation of back office services, VDDHH receives Information Technology Services from the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) through a Cooperative Agreement.
- Provides data and voice communication networks for 60 facilities statewide in cooperation with VITA (Virginia Information Technology Agencies)
- Provides systems engineering services through VITA including voice and data communications networks, hardware and computer support services
- Provides computer applications development and support, and web services
- Provides technology procurement, security, asset tracking, policy and mini-computer support services

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Factor Impacting Information Technology

- VITA now provides systems engineering and network services to DRS. Changes driven by VITA transformation activities may change DRS' ability to serve external agency and internal information technology customers. Changes in standards to network architecture may delay, negatively impact, or complicate DRS' ability to communicate with its external customers and / or partners. The Infrastructure Public – Private Education Act (IPPEA) will establish new standards.
- VITA as an entity is taking an active role and responsibility for creating requirements, directives, standards, policies, and guidelines which impact the agency in an effort to promote consistency in technology across the Commonwealth. In some instances, VITA decisions may not always be in the best interests of the agency. At this time, VITA may not have the resources, the organizational direction, or the agency specific knowledge to move forward in an effective and efficient manner. This may cause delays in services and temporary cost increases. For example, the proposed VITA Web accessibility standard for intranet applications will cause DRS to re-engineer all existing internal web applications. This will impact further development projects by delays while the existing applications are revised. There will be time and financial impacts.
- Technology advances continue to develop at a more rapid pace than the agency IS resources can gain the appropriate knowledge to implement effectively on the agency's behalf.
- The agency runs an HP3000 mini-computer, a hardware platform retired by the manufacturer. We hope to have plans to eliminate HP3000 based applications by moving them to SQL server environments. The number of applications that are migrating and the person hours needed to successfully migrate the applications are too extensive to develop using internal resources.
- A comprehensive, Integrated Case Management (ICM) automated system is currently in development. Successful implementation in 2007 will provide a single management tool which impacts most agency programs to serve our agency consumers more effectively. There are identified risks to successful implementation on time and on budget.
- The agency is developing requirements for a new integrated financial system to replace the 20 year old legacy system. This is directly impacted by the HP3000 platform. Any catastrophic failure of the legacy system prior to replacement will seriously impact the agency's and our partner agencies' ability to meet the prompt payment guidelines established in the Code of Virginia and meet federal and state reporting deadlines.
- The Enterprise Application Public-Private Education Act (EPPEA) will impact the agency with regard to new Commonwealth – Enterprise wide applications in Financial and Human Resources. VITA and the Secretaries of Administration and Finance play a major role factor in its determination.

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Anticipated Changes / Desired State

- DRS will continue to support the work of the IPPEA engineering and network services through active participation in the workgroup which recommends the standards and evaluates the proposals of the private partners. DRS will work to implement all standards. Delays on new initiatives may occur. In order to avoid delays, new budget considerations may be requested to hire supplemental staff to implement the changes.
- DRS will continue to support the requirements, directives, standards, policies, and guidelines which impact the agency in an effort to promote consistency in technology across the Commonwealth by working with VITA and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources in the Cabinet Agency Technology Team. DRS will work to implement all standards. Delays on new initiatives may occur. In order to avoid delays, new budget considerations may be requested to hire supplemental staff to implement the changes.
- DRS plans to retrain its internal staff and/or hire consultants as necessary to meet the rapid pace of Technology advances where these changes are appropriate to implement for the good of the agency, its consumers, and/or in the best interests of the Commonwealth.
- The agency plans to replace the HP3000 platform within 5 years. All HP3000 applications will migrate to a new SQL, Web based application environment.
- The ICM will be implemented by 2007. It will enable most consumer program staff to input, view, analyze and share information at any location accessible by the internet.
- The new fiscal processing system will be implemented by 2007. It will interface with all consumer program, administrative and Commonwealth Enterprise fiscal processes
- DRS will continue to support the work of the EPPEA application development services by providing feedback through ORCA to the workgroup which recommends the standards and evaluates the proposals of the private partners. DRS will work to implement all standards. Delays on new initiatives may occur. In order to avoid delays, new budget considerations may be requested to hire supplemental staff to implement the changes.
- As Federal, Virginia Commonwealth legislation, grants, or agency advocates require, Information Services will purchase or design, develop, implement and support technology projects which fulfill the specific negotiated requirements.

Agency Information Technology Investments:

	<u>Cost-Fiscal Year 2007</u>		<u>Cost-Fiscal Year 2008</u>	
	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund
Major IT Projects	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Non-Major IT Projects	\$23,750	\$0	\$23,750	\$0
Major IT Procurements	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Non-Major IT Procurements	\$12,000	\$0	\$12,000	\$0
Totals	\$35,750	\$0	\$35,750	\$0

Agency Goals

Agency Strategic Plan

Department for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

Goal #1:

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.

Goal Summary and Alignment:

Technology presents the greatest opportunity for communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing yet it has also, historically, resulted in some of the greatest barriers to communications access. Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing are increasingly demanding access to a variety of technologies which can further eliminate barriers to access. Unfortunately, in many cases, the technologies with the greatest opportunity to break down barriers are cost-prohibitive for the average consumer who is 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.

Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #1

- Elevate the levels of educational preparedness and attainment of our citizens.
- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Inspire and support Virginians toward healthy lives and strong and resilient families.
- Protect the public's safety and security, ensuring a fair and effective system of justice and provide prepared response to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.

Goal #2:

Ensure that persons who are deaf or hard of hearing are prepared for and have effective communications access during emergency situations.

Goal Summary and Alignment:

Recent disasters, natural and man-made, have resulted in heightened awareness about preparedness at the state and national level but government and media plans for responding to future situations must address communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and information provided to the public to assist them in preparing for such events must also address the preparation needs of these same consumers.

Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #2

- Protect the public's safety and security, ensuring a fair and effective system of justice and provide prepared response to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.

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Goal #3:

Increase the availability, quality and utilization of communication facilitators (interpreters and CART providers)

Goal 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 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.

Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #3

- Elevate the levels of educational preparedness and attainment of our citizens.
- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.
- Inspire and support Virginians toward healthy lives and strong and resilient families.
- Protect, conserve and wisely develop our natural, historical and cultural resources.
- Protect the public's safety and security, ensuring a fair and effective system of justice and provide prepared response to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.
- Ensure that Virginia has a transportation system that is safe, enables easy movement of people and goods, enhances the economy and improves our quality of life.

Goal #4:

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.

Goal Summary and Alignment:

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.

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Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #4

- Elevate the levels of educational preparedness and attainment of our citizens.
- Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.
- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.
- Inspire and support Virginians toward healthy lives and strong and resilient families.
- Protect, conserve and wisely develop our natural, historical and cultural resources.
- Protect the public's safety and security, ensuring a fair and effective system of justice and provide prepared response to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.
- Ensure that Virginia has a transportation system that is safe, enables easy movement of people and goods, enhances the economy and improves our quality of life.

Goal #5:

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

Goal Summary and Alignment:

With a wide and diverse customer base seeking current and critical information, VDDHH 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, library services, the Internet and others.

Statewide Goals Supported by Goal #5

- Engage and inform citizens to ensure we serve their interests.
- Inspire and support Virginians toward healthy lives and strong and resilient families.
- Protect the public's safety and security, ensuring a fair and effective system of justice and provide prepared response to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.