Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs, Equity Programs Division

Communications Accessibility

As a public entity, the County must provide accessibility in communications to people with hearing, visual and speech impairments. Communications accessibility can be provided through provisions of **auxiliary aids and services**.

An auxiliary aid is a service or device that individuals with disabilities can use to overcome some of the limitations caused by their disabilities. These range from services such as qualified sign language interpreters, qualified readers and closed captioned-video programs, to devices such as taped, Brailed, large print materials (alternative formats), assistive listening systems, or computers that have speech capabilities.

A. Communicating with Individuals with Hearing or Speech Impairments:

Between 2000 and 2004, estimates of the number of people in the United States with a self-described "hearing difficulty" ranged from 28.6 million [1] to 31.5 million.[2] The number of individuals with hearing difficulty is expected to rise rapidly by the year 2010 when the baby-boomer generation reaches age 65. As compared to other age groups, the percentage of individuals with hearing difficulty is greatest among those individuals age 65 and above.[3] A "hearing difficulty" can refer to the effects of many different hearing impairments of varying degrees.

Telephone Communications:

There are several options for communicating via telephone with persons with hearing impairments. One such option is **Telecommunication device for the Deaf or TTY**.

"TTY" or text telephone (a more generic terminology) is a device that provides access to real-time telephone communications for persons with hearing or speech impairments. Text telephones provide some form of keyboard input and visual display output to callers and receiving parties and enable non-voice communications with other users of such devices through the public telephone lines and network. A call from one text telephone can only be received by another (and compatible) text telephone. The device, however, can be used by

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[1] Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D., Better Hearing Institute, The Prevalence of Hearing Loss, http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/prevalence.cfm .

[2] Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D., MarkeTrak VII: Hearing Loss Population Tops 31 Million People, The Hearing Review, 2005, Vol. 12, No. 7, at 16.

[3] Chart is based on data derived from A Nation Online, Economic and Statistics Administration/National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, February 2002, based on Current Population Survey (CPS) of September 2001.

and between both hearing and non-hearing persons. Two-way communications between individuals who use text telephones and those who do not is accomplished through 24-hour operator assisted relay services.

If your agency owns or has access to a TTY, it is very important that the agency conduct training on the use of the equipment, for all the staff, especially those working with the public. Although County agencies have TTY's, due to infrequency of their use in the past, few people may remember how it works or what to do when it rings. As an extension to the training and as a refresher, type and post the TTY operating directions in a visible location next to the equipment.

If your agency does not have a TTY and you must call or return a call to a person with a hearing impairment, you can do the following:

In the Government Center, you can make a call from the TTY located at the main information desk or use the Virginia Relay Center. In other County facilities, you can receive or make a call using the Virginia Relay Center.

The **Virginia Relay Center (VRC)** is a public service of the Commonwealth of Virginia, overseen by Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH). The VRC, operated under state contract by AT&T, relays conversations between people who use text telephones and persons who use voice telephones, 24 hours a day. There is no charge for using VRC and all calls are held in strict confidence. To make a relay call, dial:

711 Voice/TTY Users

Making a relay call is easy!

A deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired person calls the VRC at 711 with a text telephone and tells the communications assistant (CA or the operator) the phone number of the person they want to call. The CA calls the hearing person and announces that this is a relay call. The CA then lets the TTY user know that she/he can begin the conversation. The deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired person types her/his message on the TTY and the CA reads it to the hearing person. The hearing person voices the response and the CA types the message to the TTY user.

A hearing person calls VRC at 711 with the TTY number of the person they want to call. The CA will call the TTY user and the hearing person can begin the conversation.

It is important to remember when using the Virginia Relay Center, that although you are communicating through an operator, you are talking to the person with the hearing impairment. Therefore, when you talk, address the person to whom you are making the call directly, and not the operator.

For any comments, suggestions or complaints about VRC, contact:

Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203
Richmond, VA 23229
1-800-552-7917 (Voice/TTY)

Your agency TTY number or the VRC number must be included whenever the agency telephone number appears in any public notice, advertisement, publication or any other form of written communications to the public, produced by your agency. In addition, a sign concerning TTY availability and location must be posted in the public area of your agency. A typical sign which must include the international TTY symbol, is included in the appendix.

Person to Person Communications

Based on the communications needs, a variety of resources can be used for person to person communications. Some examples are: using pen and paper in simple, non-complex and brief discussions, assistance of a staff member fluent in sign language (with knowledge and concurrence of the individual with hearing impairment), and using sign language interpreters.

• Sign Language Interpreters/Cued Speech Transliterators

Persons with hearing impairments may call to request sign language interpreters or Cued Speech Transliterators, anytime verbal communication is used to convey a message to the public. Examples are: dedication ceremonies, public hearings, interviews, meetings, etc. The average length of time a person can comfortably interpret and keep the signs large and readable is about 1 hour; so several interpreters may be needed for long programs.

The County has contracts with a number of vendors for sign language interpreters. Some of these vendors also provide Cued Speech Transliteration. When corresponding with the public (notices for meetings, public hearings, due process, interviews, etc.), you must include your agency phone and TTY number or the Virginia Relay Center number and a statement indicating that, sign language interpreters will be provided upon request.

The following page provides information about the current contractors. If you are not satisfied with the services of any vendor, or if there is a “no show,” please inform the Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs, Equity Programs Division at 703-324-2207 (voice), 703-222-5494 (TTY).

In order to arrange for an interpreter for a program, service or activity use the following procedure:

Procedure

1.0 Any agency can request an interpreter for any public hearing, transaction, or other activity directly related to County business. This does not preclude County personnel fluent in sign language from communicating information and transacting County business directly, provided the hard-of-hearing person has been **informed** that a certified interpreter can be requested and indicates that one is not needed.

However, if there is a due process requirement involving a person who is deaf or has hearing and/or speech impairments, then a **certified** interpreter or transliterator (certified by National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf - RID – or a level IV interpreter – screened by the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Quality Assurance Screening) provided by the agency, **must** be present. Examples of due process involving a person's rights, might include, but are not limited to: Termination or other personnel actions involving a County employee, a zoning appeal case, appeal of an assessment, appeal of an eligibility determination for public assistance, etc.

2.0 A County agency receiving a request for an interpreter is responsible for calling the contractor and scheduling the service. **The sign language contractor must be told that the request is for Fairfax County**. There is no need to contact the Office of Equity Programs in making a request. The consumer requesting the service should be asked what special requirements (an ASL oral interpreter, a sign language or a cued speech transliterator) are needed so that this information can be given to the contractor at the time the request is made. **You must provide your agency's billing address at the time arrangements are made.**

3.0 The amount of lead time has an impact on the cost your agency will pay. All efforts must be made to schedule interpreter services **more than five (5) business days in advance** in order to keep costs to a minimum. The contractors charge an hourly rate based on a 2 hour minimum. Sessions requiring more than two hours should have two interpreters present to provide continuous interpreting services.

4.0 To avoid penalty or full charge for the service please note the following: If the County cancels a previously scheduled interpreting assignment the cancellation must be received by the Contractor, two (48 hours) full business days in advance or the County will be obligated to pay the following:

a. 1 business day (0-24 hours) or less–Interpreter will receive full compensation of the scheduled time.
b. 2 business days (25-48 hours) —Interpreter will receive 50% compensation of the scheduled time.
c. 3 business days – no compensation provided (beyond 48 hours).

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5.0 Each agency should have an internal policy, if desired, stating who is authorized to coordinate requests for interpreting services and circumstances under which higher authorization is needed.

6.0 Each agency is responsible for creating a Purchase Order in PIMS and for payment of interpreting charges for services requested by the agency.

Consumer Satisfaction

In order to make the best effort possible in meeting the public's need for effective interpreting services, each agency should solicit consumer comments about satisfaction with the interpreting service provided. You may obtain a customer feedback form by calling the Equity Programs Division. Complaints will be investigated by the Equity Programs Division and necessary action will be taken to improve the service delivery.

- **Assistive Listening Systems**

Many individuals with hearing impairments are aided in meetings and other large gatherings by assistive listening systems. In large rooms hearing aid users have great difficulty hearing speakers since the hearing aid not only amplifies the desired sound but also magnifies other sounds in the room. People with hearing impairments who do not use hearing aids often can understand speech of people near them in a quiet room, but cannot follow spoken information in larger, noisier environments. For these reasons, these individuals need assistance from the room itself.

This can be provided through Assistive Listening Systems (ALS), which pick up sound at or close to its source, amplify and deliver it to the listener's ear without extraneous sound, reverberation and distortion. ALS's together with a variety of listening attachments (neck loops, earbud or headphone type accessories), permit users of telecoil equipped hearing aids to join others in participating in meetings and large gatherings. There are four types of systems:

Frequency Modulation (FM) Systems – Sound via microphone is fed into an FM transmitter, which then sends it to small individual receivers. Hearing-aid users with telecoil or T-switch, use a neck loop and others use earphone attachments.

Audio Loop – A loop of wire circling the room near a ceiling or floor, receives input from a microphone through an amplifier and transmits the sound by creating a magnetic field within the loop. This field can be picked up by hearing-aid users with telecoil or with telecoil equipped receivers and an ear-piece. The receiver is equipped with an amplifier so that the sound level can be controlled by the user.

Infra-red – These wireless systems use invisible, harmless light beams in the infrared range of the spectrum to carry information from a transmitter connected to a microphone to a special portable receiver worn by the listener and fitted with neck loops, earbuds, or headphones to meet the user's needs. This is the only system appropriate for confidential transmission. The equipment includes the transmitter, the emmiter, headphones and neck loops for up to six people.

AM Systems – AM systems are similar to FM systems. Receivers such as AM radios in some cases, pick up the signal broadcasted from an AM radio transmitter coupled to a microphone. The listeners again need to have the appropriate listening attachments (neck loops, earbuds, or headphones) on the receivers to meet their needs.

Several County facilities are equipped with permanent, portable or personal systems assistive listening systems, available to use by agencies. See the resource section of the training workbook for a current list.

Any County agency sponsoring a function where ALS may/will be needed, can call and rent a system for their event using the county's ALS contract. Copies of this contract are available from the Office of Equity Programs. The type of system to be used depends on the facility and the size of the audience. The contractor can assist the agency in determining which would be most appropriate for the particular event.

- **Realtime Captioning and Computer Assisted Note Taking (CART)**

Realtime captioning and CART services will be provided upon request to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. In a small meeting the note taker will use his/her laptop computer to key in the auditory material and the deaf or hard of hearing person will read it off the screen. In large meetings, this information will be projected onto a large television monitor. The County is currently preparing a new contract for bid to provide this service.

Communications Accessibility

B. <u>Communicating (written) with Individuals with Vision Impairments</u>:

Alternative Formats

People who are unable to read print materials because of visual or physical impairments, including certain reading disabilities, need access to information through alternatives to print materials or **alternative formats**. An auxiliary aid in this case will include a qualified reader who, upon request, can read the document to the person who is blind or has a visual impairment. Examples of alternative formats are: large print, Braille, taped audio cassettes or computer disks.

All public documents, publications, notices, meeting announcements, reports, brochures, and other similar documents, produced by your agency for distribution, must be provided in alternative formats when requested. **You must include a statement in the document to**

indicate the availability of the alternative format. For simplification, you may specify the available formats from your agency. The following is a sample statement:

> "To request this information in an alternate format, call **[contact name or agency, telephone and TTY number].** Allow 7 days for preparation of the material."

The following formats may be requested by individuals or identified by your agency as alternative formats:

Large Print – Many people with limited vision, who cannot read regular-sized print, can read large print if it is clear, well-lighted, and has a contrasting background. The simplest way to produce something in large print is to use a large print font on your computer. Typeset large print should be in a simple sans-serif face set at 14 to 18 points. Large print can be used for exhibition labels and other displays as well as program materials. Very long materials which are produced in a large print version should be condensed. Documents may also be enlarged using a photocopier. However, you must ensure that the reproduction is made from good quality originals to minimize distortion.

Braille – Braille is a system of touch reading and writing in which raised dots arranged in cells of six, represent the letters of the alphabet. A Braille embosser or printer is available at the Library Access Services located at the Government Center. The Braille printer produces Braille on paper from Word text on a PC through a software program from DUXBURY (DUXWP), which translates text to Braille. Your source document (to be translated to Braille) can be on a diskette in simple Word text, or a printed text. The printed text can be scanned using an optical scanner (also available at Access Services), which is a desktop machine with an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software program, which views and records printed text for voice output or printing in large print or Braille. If Braille materials are requested, call the Library Access Services at 703-324-8380 voice, 703-324-8365 (TTY) for assistance and further information. Additional outside resources are available if Access Services is unable to meet your agency needs. If you have any questions, call Kathryn Smith at 703-324-2207 (voice), 703-222-5494 (TTY).

Audio Cassette Tapes – Recording program materials on cassette tapes is a good way to provide program information to participants with visual impairments. Since many persons with visual impairments cannot read Braille or large print, audio tapes may be the most usable provision. Be sure to purchase tapes with appropriate time lengths and to have someone with a clear voice translate the materials.

Readers – There is one last option to providing materials to persons with visual impairments – readers. A staff person may be assigned responsibility for reading agency materials to a person with a disability, upon request. This is a stop-gap measure, but will work if there is not a large volume of material to be read.

Disability Access Symbols

The twelve symbols below may be used to promote and publicize accessibility of places, programs and other activities for people with various disabilities.

Organizations, both public and private, are working to be fully accessible to this country's 54 million citizens with disabilities as well as foreign visitors. Organizations that receive government funding are required to provide accessible programs and services under Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A more recent law, the 1990 Americans with Disability Act (ADA), extends accessibility provisions to the private sector in order to help guarantee persons with disabilities employment and the right to enter the economic, social and cultural mainstreams. The ADA goes well beyond federally funded organizations to encompass private sector entities that serve the public, including cultural organizations that do not receive federal support, retail businesses, movie theaters, and restaurants.

These symbols are intended to help you advertise your access services to customers, audiences, staff and other targeted publics. Advertisements, newsletters, conference and program brochures, membership forms, building signage, floor plans and maps are examples of material that might display these symbols. You are encouraged to place these symbols next to the relevant information in all publications and media.

Any language accompanying the symbols should focus on the accommodation or service, not on who uses it. For example, "Ramped Entrance" may accompany the wheelchair symbol. This is important because not only do individuals in wheelchairs use ramps, but so do people with baby carriages, luggage, packages, etc. Language that fosters dignity is important too. For example, "Reserved Parking" or "Accessible Parking" may be used with the wheelchair symbol to indicate that parking spaces designated for people with disabilities

Access (Other Than Print or Braille) for Individuals Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

This symbol may be used to indicate access for people who are blind or have low vision, including: a guided tour, a path to a nature trail or a scent garden in a park; and a tactile tour or a museum exhibition that may be touched. File names: WHTCNE-P.tif or WHTCNE-N.tif

Symbol for Accessibility

The wheelchair symbol should only be used to indicate access for individuals with limited mobility including wheelchair users. For example, the symbol is used to indicate an accessible entrance, bathroom or that a phone

is lowered for wheelchair users. Remember that a ramped entrance is not completely accessible if there are no curb cuts, and an elevator is not accessible if it can only be reached via steps.

Audio Description

A service for persons who are blind or have low vision that makes the performing arts, visual arts, television, video, and film more accessible. Description of visual elements is provided by a trained Audio Describer through the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) of televisions and monitors equipped with stereo sound. An adapter for non-stereo TVs is available through the American Foundation for the Blind, (800) 829-0500. For live Audio Description, a trained Audio Describer offers live commentary or narration (via headphones and a small transmitter) consisting of concise, objective descriptions of visual elements: i.e., a theater performance or a visual arts exhibition.

Telephone Typewriter (TTY)

This device is also known as a text telephone (TT), or telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD). TTY indicates a device used with the telephone for communication with and between deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired and/or hearing persons.

Volume Control Telephone

This symbol indicates the location of telephones that have handsets with amplified sound and/or adjustable volume controls.

Assistive Listening Systems

These systems transmit amplified sound via hearing aids, headsets or other devices. They include infrared, loop and FM systems. Portable systems may be available from the same audiovisual equipment suppliers that service conferences and meetings.

Sign Language Interpretation

The symbol indicates that Sign Language Interpretation is provided for a lecture, tour, film, performance, conference or other program.

Accessible Print (18 pt. or Larger)

The symbol for large print is "Large Print" printed in 18 pt. or larger text. In addition to indicating that large print versions of books, pamphlets, museum guides and theater programs are available, you may use the symbol on conference or membership forms to indicate that print materials may be provided in large print. Sans serif or modified serif print with good contrast is important, and special attention should be paid to letter and word spacing.

The Information Symbol

The most valuable commodity of today's society is information; to a person with a disability it is essential. For example, the symbol may be used on signage or on a floor plan to indicate the location of the information or security desk, where there is more specific information or materials concerning access accommodations and services such as "LARGE PRINT" materials, audio cassette recordings of materials, or sign interpreted tours.

Closed Captioning (CC)

This symbol indicates a choice for whether or not to display captions for a television program or videotape. TV sets that have a built-in or a separate decoder are equipped to display dialogue for programs that are captioned when selected by the viewer. The Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990 requires TV sets (with screens 13" or larger) to have built-in decoders as of July, 1993. Also, videos that are part of exhibitions may be closed captioned using the symbol with instruction to press a button for captioning.

Opened Captioning (OC)

This symbol indicates that captions, which translates dialogue and other sounds in print, are always displayed on the videotape, movie or television program. Open Captioning is preferred by many including deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, and people whose second language is English. In addition, it is helpful in teaching children how to read and in keeping sound levels to a minimum in museums and restaurants.

Braille Symbol

This symbol indicates that printed material is available in Braille, including exhibition labeling, publications and signage.

The Disability Access Symbols were produced by the Graphic Artists Guild Foundation with support and technical assistance from the Office for Special Constituencies, National Endowment for the Arts. Special thanks to the National Endowment for the Arts. Graphic design assistance by the Society of Environmental Graphic Design. Consultant: Jacqueline Ann Clipsham.