

Welcome to the VIRGINIA RELAY PARTNER program. Enclosed is a brief training guide, just for employers, about using Virginia Relay. This guide is your personal support material to the Employee's Guide. Please duplicate the Employee's Guide and give it to new or existing employees as a part of your employee-training program. That handout will provide your employees with an overview of what Virginia Relay is and how to use it to serve your deaf, hard-of-hearing, DeafBlind and speech-disabled customers.

Note: The Employee's Guide training booklet works best when it is reviewed along with the Virginia Relay Partner training video. You should preview the training video, too, before using it in your employee training effort. The convenience of viewing the training video online is that you and your employees can watch it more than once with ease. Please encourage your employees to view the training video until they feel comfortable with Relay calls.

## Background Information

In the presence of a hearing or speech disability, the standard telephone is often a barrier to communication. In 1990, Title IV of the Americans With Disabilities Act required that there be a Telecommunications Relay Service put into place in each state to remove this barrier. Virginia Relay, a public service administered by the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, satisfies this mandate. The Commonwealth of Virginia has contracted with AT&T to provide Virginia Relay. The Relay allows telephone communication between standard phone users and TTY (text telephone) users. TTY users may be deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind or speech disabled. The Relay may be accessed from any phone, anywhere, anytime and there are no set-up fees or costs per local call. Virginia Relay can be used to call anywhere in the world.

Virginia Relay makes your business accessible to those who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind or speech disabled. The Relay also provides the opportunity for you to re-establish contact with customers who have stopped using the telephone due to progressive hearing loss. Either party may initiate calls, and receiving a call is as simple as answering your telephone.

## Who uses Virginia Relay?

Virginia Relay is traditionally thought of as a phone system for the deaf, but that is not completely true. There are a variety of reasons people cannot use a standard telephone and Virginia Relay has features in place to make the system accessible to all, regardless of their communication needs. Virginia Relay allows businesses, organizations and private citizens to have telephone contact with ALL consumers in Virginia.

## Virginia Relay Features

### A. Traditional Relay

An option for a people who are deaf or hard of hearing and wish to use a TTY (text telephone) to make Relay calls. With a traditional Relay call, the Virginia Relay Communications Assistant (CA) voices the TTY user's text and types the words of the standard phone user, relaying the conversation back and forth.

### B. VCO (Voice Carry-Over)

This option is for person with hearing loss and understandable speech, who chooses to speak for themselves using a specially designed telephone with a display screen. The voice you hear will be that of the customer, but the CA will type your side of the conversation back to him/her.

### C. HCO (Hearing Carry-Over)

A person with a speech disability who can hear your responses may type his/her side of the conversation, with the CA voicing it to you.

### D. STS (Speech-To-Speech)

A speech-disabled individual uses his/her own voice and a standard telephone to speak to a specially trained CA who listens carefully and repeats what is said to the other party. The customer will hear your responses.

### E. VRS Video Relay Service

With this option, sign language users can communicate by phone in their natural language via video conferencing technology. VRS uses the Internet for an audio/video link to a certified video interpreter who then relays the conversation between video of the sign language user and the person using a standard telephone.

### F. Internet Relay\*

Allows people to make Relay calls anytime, from anywhere, using their computer, Web phone, personal digital assistant (PDA) or any other Internet-capable device.

### G. Businesses, Families and Friends

Anyone who wants to contact a TTY user may call Virginia Relay from their standard telephone. No extra equipment is needed.

\* Note: The advent of new Relay technologies, like Internet Relay, has made some businesses more vulnerable to fraudulent phone transactions. When conducting sales transactions through Relay, be sure to follow the same identification and credit card verification processes that you would with a standard phone user.

## Receiving calls from Relay customers

1. When answering your telephone at work, it may be a call placed through Virginia Relay. You will hear a Virginia Relay Communications Assistant (CA) say, "Hello, Virginia Relay CA 2643."
2. If you ask "Who?" or "What?"; the CA will explain how Virginia Relay works.
3. If you say "Go Ahead," the call will proceed with the CA voicing everything to you that the deaf, hard-of-hearing or speech-disabled customer types on his/her TTY. Everything that you say will be typed back to the TTY user's device. The CA will continue relaying the messages back and forth until both you and the other party are finished with the conversation.
4. Remember to say "Go Ahead" or "GA" after each thought. When the CA says, "Go Ahead," back to you, it is your turn to respond.

\*See section on "Tips" for smooth call handling

## Making Relay calls to customers

1. Dial 7-1-1\* (in Virginia) or 1-800-828-1120 (anywhere).
2. When a CA answers, give the 10-digit number of the customer you want to reach.
3. Once the customer answers, proceed with the call as you would with a regular phone call.
4. Remember to say "Go Ahead" or "GA" after each thought. When the CA says, "Go Ahead," back to you, it is your turn respond.
5. See following section, "Tips," for smooth call handling.

\* see "PBX systems and 7-1-1" on page 4

## Tips for successful calls

### ✓ When Virginia Relay calls, don't hang up.

The person calling you is a deaf, hard-of-hearing or speech-disabled customer, using Virginia Relay to contact your business by telephone.

### ✓ Say "Go Ahead" or "GA" after each thought.

Remember that the CA must type everything you say, so try to speak clearly and slowly. It is not necessary to speak loud. When the CA says "Go Ahead" to you, it's your turn to respond.

✓ **Speak directly to the customer, not to the Virginia Relay CA.**

The CA is not a part of the conversation and will not acknowledge you if you speak to her/him. Talk in first person and pretend the CA is not there.

✓ **The Virginia Relay CA will type everything that is heard.**

To ensure equal access, CAs will type everything they hear, including background noise and voice intonation. Your words will be typed exactly as you say them.

✓ **Be patient.**

Virginia Relay calls take a few minutes longer than regular calls. Keep in mind, your time may be valuable, but so is your customer.

## **Language Differences**

Many people who are deaf use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate. This is a visual language system that is not based on English, and very often ASL users are not proficient in communicating in typed English via a TTY. For this reason, there may be some misunderstanding during a conversation. If you or your employee have difficulty understanding the content of the Relay conversation, ask the CA for an ASL translator. This translator will assist by converting the conversation into English for you and then back to the customer.

## **Control of the Call**

As a Virginia Relay user, you have control of the call. This means that if you are not satisfied with the CA for any reason, you may ask for another CA, or to speak to a supervisor. You do not have to offer any explanations for the request. Whenever placing or receiving a Relay call, it is helpful to write down the CA's number, date and time of the call. The CA handling your call should give it to you at the beginning and end of each call. In order to maintain confidentiality and transparency, the CAs will never divulge their names. By recording the CA's number, you will be able to provide us with valuable feedback, should it be necessary. It is recommended that you take care of any concerns you have while you are on the phone with the Relay.

## **PBX (private branch exchange) systems and 7-1-1\***

7-1-1 is not always available through a PBX system. If you encounter this difficulty, contact the telecommunications manager or PBX coordinator from your building. Ask them to re-program the PBX switch software to allow 7-1-1 access.

## Long-distance Charges

Long-distance calls through Virginia Relay can be billed to your carrier of choice. Give the CA your long distance information when placing the call. If you do not provide a specific company, the call will be billed through AT&T (Virginia Relay's provider) at a reduced rate.

## More Information

Virginia Relay offers a free training program to businesses and their employees. To set up a training session or for more information, call the Virginia Relay Customer Service at 1-800-552-7917 (voice/TTY), or e-mail [frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto:frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov).

## FAQ's about Deafness and Virginia Relay

### 1. How did deaf people communicate with businesses before Relay services were mandated by law?

Before Relay services were established in 1991, deaf and hard-of-hearing persons unable to use a standard telephone had to rely on neighbors or family members to make phone calls for them. The Relay is an important step towards independence and equity with the phone system.

### 2. How does a deaf person know when the telephone is ringing?

A deaf person is alerted to a ringing telephone by a light flashing system that is installed in their home or office.

### 3. What is the difference between a TDD, TTY, and TT?

TTY, TDD and TT are three different acronyms for the same assistive telephone device. The politically correct name for the device is TTY.

### 4. What is a TTY?

Looking much like a typewriter keypad with a text screen, a TTY allows a deaf, hard-of-hearing, DeafBlind or speech-disabled person to make a telephone call. The conversation is read on a lighted display screen and/or a paper printout.

### 5. My business has a dedicated TTY phone number. Why do I still get Relay calls?

Some businesses do have dedicated TTY phone lines, but may find that they still receive Relay calls. The TTY user may choose to call the business any way they wish. It is often reported that when calling a dedicated TTY line, it may be answered by a machine or by a person who does not know how to use the equipment. For this reason, a TTY user may find that by calling the businesses' voice line, they get an immediate response, rather than waiting for a return call.

### 6. I forgot to get the phone number of a customer calling my business through Virginia Relay. Can I call the CA back to get that number?

No. To assure confidentiality of all calls, no records are kept. Once the call is dropped, there is no way to retrieve that information.