

10.3. Recommendation

For this area of consideration the recommendation is:

- The providers of each part of the service are responsible to offer their own consumer technical support. This is the mixed approach described in section 10.2.6.

This approach maximizes the existing available technical support and product/service knowledge without creating new costs for that support. It also offers the possibility of a third party that can provide the knowledge transfer from the Deaf consumers to the manufacturers/service providers, and feedback for common issues to the Deaf community. The costs associated with this third party can be controlled through the management of roles, responsibilities and funding.

11. Education and Outreach

As discussed in more detail in this study's phase 7, *Quality of Service*, education and outreach will be key components to a successful VRS implementation. All potential users of VRS (Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing and hearing) will need to know: how VRS works; the compatibility requirements for consumer equipment, software, and broadband; how to acquire the equipment and software; how to make and receive calls; how to sign up for the service and what functional options are available; how to reach customer service; how to get technical help; and other related information.

From a design perspective the issues are:

- Who needs to receive education and outreach?
- Who should carryout it out?
- Who should pay for it?

11.1. Desired Outcomes

Desired outcomes for education and outreach are an understanding

- By potential VRS consumers that the service is available, and what is necessary in order to use it.
- By hearing users that VRS calls may be made or received.
- By the telecommunication service providers, wireless service providers, and Internet service providers (all referred to herein as "TSPs") of their role in providing VRS.

11.2. Options

Five primary options offered for consideration are that education and outreach should be provided:

1. By the VRS vendors.
2. By the nonprofit groups that represent consumers.

3. By the TSPs.
4. By public social service agencies.
5. By a mixture of the above.

11.2.1. Provided by the VRS vendors

This option assumes that the VRS providers are in the best position and are the most motivated to perform education and outreach, and can do so as a normal operating expense of VRS. Minimum requirements for education and outreach could be included within a provider's contract, or an approach could be taken in which requirements are not set, and providers carry out education and outreach to the extent that they believe will benefit their ability to successfully provide the service and at an expense that they determine contributes to their return on investment and profit.

Advantages of this option

1. VRS providers are inherently motivated to take all reasonable steps to maximize consumer use of the service. Therefore they should be willing to perform this function.
2. VRS providers can perform this function as part of their normal operations. Therefore no additional contracts are required for education and outreach.
3. VRS providers should be able to communicate using the preferred sign language of the potential consumers of VRS.
4. Certain functions such as customer service are best provided by the VRS vendor. It can be unclear to what extent customer service may be considered education and outreach. Having the VRS provider responsible for all eliminates any potential concern about who is appropriately performing which function.
5. Having the VRS provider do education and outreach will ensure that the provider develops close relations with the consumers, and knows of their concerns and needs.

Disadvantages of this option

1. VRS providers' primary motivation is to make a profit. Any education and outreach performed by them will be only to that purpose. Education and outreach that does not significantly contribute to the bottom line, will not be done or will not be done effectively.
2. Some types of education, such as general media campaigns to hearing users to let them know about VRS (e.g., do not hang up on VRS calls), are likely not within the VRS provider's normal business skill set, and should not be expected to be performed effectively or efficiently by them.
3. While it may be normal for a few VRS providers to perform education and outreach, their core competency and business focus is running multiple small VRS call centers. They may not have the trained resources to perform the necessary education and outreach.
4. Canada is geographically a very large country. Education and outreach may be too large a task for a medium to small VRS provider.
5. In VRS models where there are multiple VRS providers competing for consumers (such as in the U.S.), the VRS providers are motivated to perform education and outreach in order to try to gain market share. If Canada adopts a VRS model with only one provider for ASL and one provider

for LSQ, those providers will have no competitive motivation to perform education and outreach.

6. Education and outreach performed by the VRS providers tends to emphasize the provider company rather than the service. For example, a provider will try to use media and outreach to “brand” their name and selection of their product/service, rather than promoting a generic service such as “VRS Canada” that might be the general service description for all VRS provided in Canada at the time, and in the future.

11.2.2. Provided by the consumer groups

This option assumes that the consumer advocacy and social groups are the best organizations to provide education and outreach.

Advantages of this option

1. The consumer advocacy groups and social organizations of the Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing know their members’ needs, and are better connected to their members, than any other entities.
2. They already have established two-way communication with their members, and education and outreach are already a normal and significant part of their operations.
3. They can communicate using the preferred sign language of the potential VRS consumers.
4. The consumer groups will be highly motivated to perform some level of VRS education and outreach to their members, as a function that will be highly valued by their members.

Disadvantages of this option

1. Consumer advocacy and social groups are generally not equipped to handle VRS customer service.
2. Except for just a few national or provincial groups, most consumer groups cover a very small geographic area or potential user base. In order to assure that the consumer groups perform education and outreach with consistency of effort and message, some entity will need to coordinate the ongoing engagement of these groups.
3. Most consumer groups are run by volunteers, who may not have the time, skills or financial capabilities to perform VRS education and outreach adequate to the need.

11.2.3. Provided by the communication utilities (TSPs)

This option assumes that because VRS will be funded by the telecommunications and IP providers, and is regulated by the CRTC, then the telecommunications service providers (wireline and wireless and Internet service providers), should be responsible for education and outreach as a normal part of their business.

Advantages of this option

1. All VRS consumers will be customers of a TSP and therefore should be able to be reached by their TSP.

2. Since TSPs need to be aware of VRS anyway, an argument can be made that they should therefore be made responsible for VRS education and outreach.
3. TSPs have existing operations in marketing and education. Therefore they should have the skills and resources to perform the function, especially to the hearing community.

Disadvantages of this option

1. TSPs do not understand the Deaf and would therefore not be effective at education and outreach to the potential VRS user community.
2. TSPs do not have two-way communications already established with potential VRS consumers, and are not equipped to do so.
3. TSPs are not equipped to communicate in the sign language of the potential VRS consumers.
4. The TSPs will view VRS as a cost but not as a revenue generator. Therefore they will never be motivated to perform VRS education and outreach, and will not be motivated to do an excellent job. Education and outreach performed by TSPs will likely be inadequately performed, will not be sensitive to the needs of the Deaf or other VRS consumers, and will not adequately offer two-way communication with the VRS consumers.
5. The customer service and technical support functions of TSPs will likely remain focused on the services that they directly offer, and will likely not be expanded to include VRS functions. Therefore TSPs should not be expected to answer customer service and technical support issues of VRS, except as they may relate to the TSP portion of the call or service set up.

11.2.4. Provided as a public social service

This option assumes that VRS education and outreach can be best performed as a public service of a government run or sponsored social service. In addition to general public education campaigns, this type of approach can also be used to reach specific social or business venues for messages tailored to these organizations. Examples are educational campaigns directed at financial institutions, health care providers or insurers, educational institutions and districts, large business employers, etcetera. Each of these will need to know how to accept and use VRS in light of their own unique concerns for consumer privacy or other considerations. This type of education and outreach can be performed directly by the social service agency or contracted to marketing campaign companies.

Advantages of this option

1. General public education campaigns are a normal part of social service programs (such as stop smoking campaigns, etcetera), and therefore can be most effectively managed by these organizations.
2. Public education campaigns have been proven to be the most effective, consistent and cost efficient way to reach the general population with a simple message, when a large for-profit business is not self-motivated to advertise the message.

Disadvantages of this option

1. Social service programs may not have the knowledge, the expertise, or the close relationships with the Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing communities that are needed in order for education and outreach to these groups to be effective.³³
2. Public education campaigns are only effective for a simple message. They cannot effectively communicate details.
3. Most social agencies cannot communicate using the preferred sign language of potential VRS consumers.
4. Social agencies will have no expertise in the VRS customer service that will be needed by VRS consumers.

11.2.5. Hybrid of the above

This option assumes that the best way to provide the necessary VRS education and outreach will be by a mixture of the above options.

Advantages of this option

1. This approach will ensure that the organizations that are best at what they do, and are motivated to perform education and outreach within their normal business operations, are engaged for those functions.
2. This approach will not try to be a “one-size fits all” solution, but will match specific education and outreach needs to organizational capabilities.

Disadvantages of this option

1. It will take an overall planning, coordination and ongoing management effort, which may need to be significant.
2. Funding will need to be allocated to multiple organizations and through multiple contracts or grants.

11.3. Recommendation

As seen from the review of advantages and disadvantages, different organizations have different purposes, resources and motivations. No single approach will likely meet all of the requirements for education and outreach. Therefore the recommendation is for:

- Different organizations to offer education and outreach according to their expertise and constituents. This is the hybrid or mixed approach described in section 11.2.5, and is suggested with the following particulars:

³³ They could, however, collaborate with the Deaf advocacy organizations and interpreting agencies to make their messages available in sign language and to develop outreach plans.

- ✓ VRS providers are best suited to offer VRS customer service and VRS technical support.
- ✓ VRS providers should be expected to perform some direct outreach activities to VRS consumers so that they make themselves available to learn directly from consumers what service improvements are desired.
- ✓ Consumer advocacy and social organizations are best suited to provide most outreach to their members who are potential VRS consumers.
- ✓ Government (federal, provincial or local) social agencies are best suited to provide educational campaigns to the general public, especially to the hearing population.
- ✓ TSPs will need to be educated regarding the availability of VRS to their customers and will need to know the technical requirements of how their services work with VRS so that they can be responsive to VRS consumers who need assistance in establishing or troubleshooting their VRS connection. But TSPs should not be expected to perform VRS education and outreach to either the VRS consumers or to the general population.
- ✓ A third party coordinator/administrator will be needed to manage or coordinate some of the above efforts.

12. Other Related Services

In this study's phase 8, *Potential Related Services*, six services that could be associated with VRS were analyzed for potential inclusion or exclusion with Canadian VRS.³⁴ In this section 12, these related services are considered from the perspective of an optimum VRS model.

12.1. Desired Outcomes

The primary desired outcomes for the possibility of including the related services within VRS are:

- The additional services offer functionality that will be desired by consumers
- The additional services do not add any significant cost to the VRS program
- The additional services do not create a significant additional demand for interpreters
- The additional services do not create a significant administrative or management burden on the program
- The additional services do not create a significant technical or administrative challenge for the VRS providers

³⁴ See this study's phase 8, *Potential Related Services*, for descriptions of these services, a discussion of their application to VRS, the potential relative significance of their cost impacts to VRS, their congruity to MRS regulations, and their potential effect on VRS administrative oversight.