

**Nebraska Public Service Commission -  
Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program  
("NSTEP")  
Program Policies and Procedures  
Effective May 10, 2022**

**Recent Changes To Program Policies and Procedures:**

- Effective May 10, 2022 iPads/tablets/other personal computing devices that have been reconfigured as dedicated Speech Generating Devices (SGDs) will qualify (See Chart 1.K, page 7 of 9);
- Effective April 28, 2020, Amplified Expandable Phone Systems (one base unit + one additional handset) are eligible (See Chart 1.F, page 6 of 9).

**I. Policies Relating to Applicants.**

- A. **Eligibility Requirements.** Participation in this program is made by application. Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:
1. Individuals must have a hearing, visual and hearing loss, or speech disability that prevents them from using the telephone effectively;
  2. The individual is three years of age or older, and can demonstrate the ability to use the equipment;
  3. The person has telephone service or has applied for telephone service in the state of Nebraska at their primary place of residence. Applicants requesting wireless devices are exempt of this requirement;
  4. The person is a current resident of the state of Nebraska;
  5. The individual has not applied in this program within a five (5) year period (*only one individual per household may be an owner of telecommunications equipment at one time and you cannot reapply for assistance more than once every five years*);
  6. In addition to the above requirements, the applicant must obtain a professional's certification of your disability. This requirement is satisfied by having the representative completing the reverse side of the application form.

B. **Dual Disabled Applicants.** Applicants who are “dual-disabled,” that is who are Deaf/Blind or who are severely hearing/and vision disabled may have special equipment needs and are exempt of the Part II policies relating to equipment selection, subject to the following guidelines:

1. **TTY and Large Visual Display or/Telebrailer.** Persons desiring a TTY equipped with a Large Visual Display device (“LVD”) or a Telebrailer must also complete a supplemental application form. This supplemental application requires a professional certification that due to severe visual disabilities, the applicant could not benefit from the use of a TTY with standard display, but could benefit from the use of a TTY equipped with a Large Visual Display (“LVD”) or a Telebrailer.
2. **Deaf/Blind Devices.** Devices that do not fall into one of the categories above but are specifically designed for Deaf/Blind communications are eligible. The supplemental application referred to in I.B.1 must be completed.

**Applicants who satisfy the criteria of Dual Disabled will have submitted the Application Form, the United States Citizenship Attestation Form and the Supplemental application form to the Commission.**

C. **Reapplying.** Reapplying in this program is subject to the following policies:

1. You can reapply only after serving a five year waiting period from the date of your previous application if you received equipment previously;
2. You can reapply if your medical condition has changed to the extent that it now requires you to use different equipment. Special approval by the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be required.

## **II. Policies Relating to Equipment Selection.**

A. **Specialized Telephone Equipment.** Applicants can only choose one (1) piece of telephone equipment per household (noted as Part 1 on the application form). A sample list of telephone equipment categories that are acceptable is provided in Chart 1 following these policies and procedures.

If applicants chose a printing TTY, only six (6) rolls of TTY paper are allowed.

*Note: Wireless Devices. Eligibility of wireless devices comprises either of the following categories; 1) Cellphones (must have either amplification or text-messaging capability); 2) iPhones or; 3) Other Smartphones. You will receive a special packet for selecting wireless devices along with your*

*voucher. The Commission has established special procedures with the providers contained in that packet. Current wireless providers available are T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, Verizon and Viaero.*

**B. Notification Systems (telephone signaling devices that alert you).**

Applicants can only choose one (1) type of signaling device, either a 1) Telephone Visual Ring Signaler; 2) Loud Ringer Signaler or; 3) Tactile Ring Signaler per household. If you choose a visual ring signaler, you can have one signaler and a maximum of two (2) additional visual ring remote receivers. A sample list of signaling devices that are acceptable are provided in Chart 2 following these policies and procedures. Only one loud ringer or one tactile ring signaler is allowed.

- C. Vendor Responsibilities.** Vendors may not alter vouchers in any way without receiving prior permission from the Public Service Commission Coordinator. Vendor invoices submitted for payment that reflects equipment that does not qualify for reimbursement will require the vendor to seek payment from the applicant.

**III. Policies Relating to Setup costs, Equipment Maintenance, Repairs and Warranties.**

- A. Setup Costs.** Costs the vendor incurs in labor for equipment setup and providing instructional guidance on use of the equipment may be billed to the Commission on the same invoice as the equipment sale. Any premise wiring (i.e. “inside wire”), materials or any other additional construction costs related to installation shall be the responsibility of the applicant.
- B. Equipment Maintenance.** Since the applicant owns the equipment, generally, the applicant would need to take the equipment to a repair service that is qualified to perform any maintenance that the product instructs the owner to make. Applicants absorb the cost for these services.
- C. Repairs & Warranties.** For servicing of equipment that goes beyond the date of the express (written) warranty that goes with the product, generally the applicant would follow the same procedure as explained above.

For servicing of the equipment within the warranty period that go with the product, generally, the applicant will follow the instructions that go with the product for servicing the equipment. This may require the applicant shipping the product directly to the manufacturer or the manufacturer directing the applicant to the party that performs repairs for the manufacturer. Any costs for these repairs are the applicant’s responsibility.

- D. **Extended Warranties.** Applicants are responsible for paying for any extended warranties and are not to be included on the vendor's invoice to the Public Service Commission.

#### **IV. Procedures For Applicants Regarding the Program.**

- A. **Vendor Contact.** When the applicant receives the voucher, you must contact the vendor to order your equipment. After ordering, the applicant is required to sign and date the voucher in the section titled, 'Applicant's Information.' This serves as signature verification that the person who applied for the program is the person who ordered the equipment. ,
- B. **Voucher Delivery.** The applicant is required to deliver all pages of the voucher to the vendor after signing as indicated above.
- C. **Setup costs, Maintenance, Repairs and Warranties.** See Section III above for policies relating to these activities.

#### **V. Vendor Overall Policies and Procedures Regarding the Program.**

- A. **Approval Process.** Vendors must apply for participation before submitting vouchers for payment in this program. The application for vendor participation can be obtained by calling statewide toll free at 1-800-526-0017, (402) 471-0225/Voice or visiting the Commission's web site at [www.psc.nebraska.gov](http://www.psc.nebraska.gov), chose the 'Telecom/NUSF Main Page' option under the 'Telecom/NUSF' menu, then chose the 'Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS)' button, then 'Vendor Participation Application Package.'

- B. **Equipment Selection.** Vendors are encouraged to contact the Public Service Commission for any questions regarding equipment eligibility.

*Note: No "accessories" are allowed (i.e. extra batteries, dust covers or extended warranties). Up to six rolls of paper are allowed on printing TTYs or other devices. This is the only exception.*

- C. **Product Knowledge.** Vendors are required to be knowledgeable of all products being offered in this program.
- D. **Voucher and Invoice Processing.** Vendors are required to adhere to the following guidelines for voucher and invoice processing:
1. **Itemization of Invoice.** Vendors shall remit an original signed (white) copy of the voucher with original invoice. Invoices shall be itemized (please reflect shipping and handling as a separate line item – not "bundled" with the equipment). Itemization also relates to reflecting the model on the invoice. **Note: The Manufacturer and manufacturer's**

**model number is to be reflected on the invoice – not the vendor’s “product code” or “item number” if it differs from the manufacturer’s model number.**

2. **Payment Authorization:** If the total invoice exceeds \$1,000 (excluding setup costs), the applicant must pay the excess. Setup costs are not counted toward the total invoice portion in determining the \$1,000 limitation.
3. **Wireless Devices.** Eligible devices include cellphones, iPhones and smartphones depending on provider. A one-time activation fee may be paid by the Commission as well.
4. **Setup Costs.** If the applicant requests setup, the vendor may include the actual costs of such to be billed to the Commission on the same invoice as the equipment sale. These costs include labor for equipment setup and providing instructional guidance on use of the equipment. Any premise wiring (i.e. “inside wire”), materials or any other additional construction costs related to installation shall be the responsibility of the applicant.

***Documentation must accompany the invoice for setup costs including hours, and hourly rates for setup and instruction. Trip costs (mileage) must include a web-based document (i.e. “MapQuest”) substantiating actual miles used and the current IRS rate for business mileage.***

5. **Special Authorization.** If this box is checked on the voucher, no dollar limitation applies; this applicant is dual disabled. See Section I.B.
6. **Sales Tax.** Sales tax is to be reflected on all invoices submitted to the Commission. The NSTEP program pays for the total vendor invoice, including taxes. The vendor shall not collect sales taxes from the applicant. Vendor is responsible for the proper sales tax remittance and reporting procedures to the appropriate taxing jurisdictions.

If there are any questions or concerns, please call our state-wide toll free number at 1-800-526-0017 or call Brett Bode direct at (402) 471-0225.

<b>Chart 1 – Sample Categories of Specialized Telecommunications Equipment that Qualify For Selection (You may chose only one).</b>	
<b>Equipment Category</b>	<b>Equipment Function</b>
A. Amplified Telephones.	Increases volume level of incoming calls. Some models enhance the tone and frequency range as well.
B. Captioned Telephones. Analog or High-Speed Internet version are allowed.	These phones use specially designed speech recognition technology that transcribes the user’s voice to text and transmits this information in near real-time on the captioned telephone user’s device.
C. Cellular phones and Smartphones (must be amplified or text-messaging capable). One-time activation fee is paid by the applicant. Applicant is responsible for determining if the provider covers their service area.	Wireless, voice-based communication system generally using “line-of-sight” technology. Service area coverage may be limited by a variety of physical and other environmental conditions. Wireless devices are restricted to cellphones, iPhones and Smartphones.
D. Cochlear Implant Phones.	Amplified telephones modified for compatibility with t-coils and cochlear implant processors. Become familiar with the Speech Processor (“SP”) guidelines for cochlear implant users.
E. Computer Conversion Packages.	Software and hardware that enables your PC to work like a TTY. Personal computers do not qualify.
F. Expandable Phone Systems (includes Corded/Cordless combinations). <b>This category became eligible effective April 28, 2020. The Commission will allow the base unit and one (1) additional handset only.</b>	These are corded or cordless amplified phones that include a base unit and one or more additional handsets in the package. Included in this definition are corded/cordless telephone combinations.
G. Large Visual Displays (Supplemental application required).	Designed for visually disabled individuals. Magnifies the characters in your TTY conversations. Blue-green lens is standard on most models, but other colors are available on most models.
H. Pagers (Program may pay one-time activation fee and for product only – not the monthly service). Applicant is responsible for determining if the provider covers their service area.	Allows text messaging within the service area covered by the provider. Paging range may be limited to weather and other environmental conditions and “line-of sight” technology.

I. Pocket Speak & Read VCO Phone. Amplified phone cannot be purchased in addition to this device because you are no longer using the earpiece. See equipment function discussion.	Device that attaches to mobile phones, pay phones, cordless phones as well as traditional phones and call boxes. (Works best with analog phones). This device is placed over the earpiece, the relay center is called, and the user speaks into the mouthpiece and read the responses. (Person receiving the VCO call must change their TTY to Baudot).
J. Speech Amplified Telephone (These telephones amplify the outgoing voice).	Designed for people with a low volume voice with loudness control settings.
K. Speech Generating Devices (SGDs) <b>Note: Effective May 10, 2022 iPads, tablets/other personal computing devices reconfigured as dedicated SGDs will qualify.</b>	Designed for severely speech-disabled persons. These communication devices typically generate synthesized speech sounds as a user types on a keyboard or interacts with another input device.
L. Telebrailer (Supplemental application required).	Enables deaf/blind individuals to communication using a TTY over a phone system and can be switched to activate home keys and spacebar as a Braille keyboard. Includes Braille display.
M. Telephone Amplifiers.	Devices are required to be plugged into an existing telephone. Note: In-Line amplifiers will NOT work with Trimline telephones or telephones with a dial pad in the handset. They may or may not work with digital telephone systems.
N. TTY/TT (Text Telephones):	
a. Compact/C TTYs;	Smaller, lightweight, ideal for travel. This TTY comes with a TTY-to-cell phone cable that connects to a “handsfree” jack built into compatible digital cellphones.
b. EZcom or / EZcom Pro	EZcom is designed for direct connect only (no acoustic cups). The EZcom Pro is a modified EZcom with audio jack, allowing TTY connection to an analog cellular phone.
c. Portable TTYs;	Smaller, lightweight, ideal for travel.
d. Non-Printing TTYs;	No hardcopy printout of conversation.
e. Printing TTYs;	Printing capabilities built-in.
f. TTYs w/ Large Visual Displays (Supplemental application required because the user must specify lens color);	This category applies to Large Visual Displays that connect to an external port as well as any model having a built-in “LVD” feature.
g. TTY / Voice Answering Machines;	Digital answering machine for TTY/Voice.

h. TTY Printer Paper (A maximum of six rolls only is allowed).	Self-explanatory.
O. Uniphones.	These devices are voice carry over TTYs. This all-in-one unit includes a standard telephone, amplified handset, and TTY. Ideal for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people who prefer to voice their calls.
P. Voice Carry Over (VCO) Phone. Note: if VCO with Port is purchased, the Large Visual Display or printer would be allowed as well.	Standard telephone with a visual display to read incoming messages. The port feature (if purchased) allows LVD or printer connections.
<b><i>Chart 1.1 - Exceptions, – Examples of Equipment that DO NOT Qualify for Equipment Selection</i></b>	
<b>Equipment Category</b>	<b>Equipment Function</b>
A. Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs). Several types of ALDs include Personal Amplified Systems (hearing aids), Infrared Systems, FM Systems and Loop Systems.	Designed specifically to help people hear in a variety of difficult listening situations. ALDs can be used with a personal hearing aid or separately to overcome difficulties inherent in distance from sound source situations. Basic function is to improve the “signal to noise ratio” for the listener.
B. Installation of materials and/or labor for inside wiring of a home.	Inside wire is a deregulated telephone service and as such is excluded from this program.
C. Personal Computing Devices	This category includes, but is not limited to, iPADS, Kindles, Nooks, laptops, tablets, PCs and other personal computer devices. These devices do not meet the statutory definition of Specialized Telecommunications Equipment.
D. Pocketalkers (This is technically defined as an Assistive Listening Device).	Personal amplifiers for TV listening and one-on-one communications. Assists in reducing background noise in congested situations.
E. TV equipment and/or accessories.	Closed-captioning is in this category.
F. TTY accessories (other than the TTY paper indicated in L.h, above).	This category includes adapters, TTY covers, etc.



<b>Chart 2 – Sample Categories of Notification Systems (Telephone Signaling Devices) that Qualify For Selection (You may chose only one).</b>	
<b>Equipment Category</b>	<b>Equipment Function</b>
A. (Light) Telephone Visual Ring Signalers (one transmitter and a maximum of up to two remote receivers shall be allowed).	These devices will flash a lamp or strobe to alert the individual to the telephone ringing.
B. Loud Telephone Ringers. Only one allowed.	This device will emit a loud ring (on some models a siren) to alert you to incoming calls. Individuals should note that some amplified telephones feature a built-in loud ringer.
C. Tactile Ring Signalers (Vibrating Signaler). Only one allowed.	Attaches to the waist of slacks or skirts. The unit receives signals from a transmitter which, in turn, causes a vibration to alert the individual.
D. Other Category. This category would include manufacturers of Visual alerting and Vibrating systems that monitor a wide variety of household activities. For example, the Alertmaster or Central Alert line of products. If the base unit is sold, only two (2) remote visual ring signalers or one (1) personal signaler would be allowed. Optional accessories sold as <b>Baby Sound Monitors, Door Announcers or Motion Detectors are not allowed.</b>	
<b><i>Chart 2.1 – Exceptions, Examples of Equipment that DO NOT Qualify For Equipment Selection:</i></b>	
A. Bed Vibrators.	Self-explanatory.
B. Burglar Alarms.	Self-explanatory.
C. Clocks and Wake-Up Alarm Systems.	Self-explanatory.
D. Doorbell Signalers.	Self-explanatory.
E. Motion Detectors.	Self-explanatory.
F. Smoke or Fire Detectors.	Self-explanatory.
G. Sound Signalers (This includes Baby Sound Monitor).	Self-explanatory.
H. Timers/Watches.	Self-explanatory.