REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES,
VIRGINIA INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AGENCY, AND
VIRGINIA INFORMATION & REFERRAL SYSTEM

Statewide Information and Referral Web Site Redesign

TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2005

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

November 30, 2005

TO: The Honorable Mark R. Warner
        Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

        The Honorable Vincent F. Callahan, Jr., Chair
        House Appropriations Committee

        The Honorable John H. Chichester, Chair
        Senate Finance Committee

        The Honorable Harry B. Blevins, Chair
        Virginia Commission on Youth

Item 362 F. 2 of the 2005 Appropriations Act addresses the Statewide Information and Referral (I&R) System Web site. It requires the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to work with the Virginia Information and Technologies Agency (VITA) and I&R providers to propose a plan to make it more comprehensive and user-friendly, and to submit the plan by November 30, 2005.

I&R is a fast, free and confidential way for citizens of the Commonwealth to locate hundreds of services in their communities via a toll-free telephone number. Callers are connected with trained professionals who provide referrals to a wide variety of health and human services in their own communities. The I&R Web site permits citizens to research information on their own at http://www.vaiandr.com/homeie.htm. The I&R Web site provides information and referral on basic human needs; physical and mental health resources; work initiatives; support for seniors and those with disabilities; support for children, youth and families; volunteering in communities; nutrition programs; tax credits; jobs and more.

VDSS requested a review of the I&R Web site by VITA for suggested improvements, and had an internal review of the site by the VDSS Division of Public Affairs Web team. The I&R providers Data Base Users Group also reviewed the site and made suggestions. Input was consistent across the reviews and the VDSS Web team worked with SunCoast, which hosts the I&R site, to enhance the site. The enhancements have been implemented and are detailed in the attachment.

When the new 2-1-1 telephone number replaces the I&R toll-free number, the site will be updated to reflect the change. The 2-1-1 number, which is being adopted nationally, is expected to be rolled out in early 2006 in Virginia. The enhanced Web site will provide an additional source of information and will be promoted when 2-1-1 goes live.

Sincerely,

Anthony Conyers Jr.
Commissioner

Attachment

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
DIVISION OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS WEB TEAM
I&R Web Site Redesign**

The Statewide Information & Referral (I&R) Web site (http://www.vaiandr.com/homeie.htm) provides a vast amount information on a wide variety of services to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Since the site was implemented, however, there have been improvements in Web site architecture and design that can improve access and usability of the site.

To meet the directive in Item 362 F. 2 of the 2005 Appropriations Act, the Department of Social Services received the following suggestions for making the I&R Web site more comprehensive and user friendly. The suggestions were implemented in September 2005.

Header Template (same for all pages)

- The site could be more aesthetically appealing with the use of photos and additional colors. (Since a logo for 2-1-1 has been developed and collateral marketing materials are being developed, the site should use the logo, marketing materials design and colors to ease the transition on the Web site when the 2-1-1 telephone number replaces the existing toll-free 800 I&R number. These new materials should set the tone for the enhanced Web site in order to maintain continuity.)
- A horizontal bar that permits the user to select one of the six languages available would make entry into the site more accessible. This will be particularly important as additional languages are added.
- Navigation can be improved with the number of "buttons" connecting to pages pared down.
- Navigation also can be enhanced with fixed rather than cascading navigation, which is user-friendly for the average user and certainly for those with disabilities. A search mechanism in the body of the home page should eliminate the need for cascading menus.

Footer Template (same for all pages)

The footer could spell out "contact us information" (including an e-mail link) and include both privacy policy and FOIA links.

Home Page

The body could be divided into two columns. The left column could be titled "Search for Help" and will let the user search by either subject (column format version of the existing search by subject interface) or keyword. This would seek to influence the user to try and help himself first.

The right column could be entitled "Still need help?" and would offer the alternative of calling I&R if the user still needs help. Under this heading could be the text "Call I&R. Get connected. Get Answers."

"Brochures" Page

Page would offer a bulleted list of all languages in which the I&R brochure could be printed.

"Staff Guidance" Page

This page could offer a bulleted list of I&R manual chapters. Each chapter could be a PDF. A search mechanism would allow the user to search the content of all the PDFs by key word.

"Annual Report" Page

Currently the annual report is one large PDF. It would be more user friendly if it were broken out into separate PDFs by topic (i.e. "History and Purpose," etc.), so the user could go right to what he wanted instead of wading through information he might not want. The load time also would be faster.

A search mechanism should allow the user to search the content of all the PDFs by key word.

"Add/Edit a Program" Page

This page would be similar to one currently displayed when the user clicks the "Add/Update Program" button on the home page. However, attention could be given to the following:

- The format could be adjusted to better align the text boxes so they don't meander.
- Error coding could be added to tell a user what he left off or what he entered incorrectly after he submits. It also would make sure phone numbers and e-mail addresses are valid.