

# TEPP Vendor Protocols

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## Introduction

The Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) is administered by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) under the Universal Service Fund (USF) Program and funds equipment for individuals who are hard of hearing, deaf, deaf-low vision, deaf-blind, speech impaired, or mobility or motion impaired, to purchase specialized telecommunications equipment to provide access to telecommunications.

Each vendor providing equipment to consumers through TEPP is required to follow the TEPP Vendor Protocols (Protocols) to maintain the integrity of the USF. Each vendor must agree in writing to abide by these Protocols prior to receiving reimbursement of any TEPP voucher.

Failure to abide by these Protocols may result in suspension and disqualification from TEPP participation. The Commission reserves the right to amend these Protocols at any time. These Protocols may be found on the Commission's website and supersede prior TEPP Vendor Guidelines.

## Who Can Be a TEPP Vendor?

In order to participate in TEPP, a vendor must:

- Provide the consumer with information about specialized telecommunications equipment specific to their disability;
- Be familiar with a variety of specialized telecommunications equipment designed to help individuals with hearing, speech, and/or mobility/motion impairment access to telecommunications services; and
- Be knowledgeable about equipment available for consumers in the disability categories it serves.

The Commission will consider the following information, which must be provided by the vendor, in determining whether a potential vendor is qualified to be a vendor for TEPP:

- A **Qualified Staff List** identifying each qualified staff member who is knowledgeable and familiar with a variety of specialized telecommunications equipment, specifying each staff member's credentials and experience;
- A **List of State Equipment Distribution Programs or Organizations** which identifies all state equipment distribution programs or organizations with whom vendor has an agreement to provide and distribute specialized telecommunications equipment; and
- A **Training Narrative**, including a description from the vendor of all training efforts, materials and other means for ensuring that all personnel in all vendor retail outlets or call centers working with TEPP consumers understand the requirements of TEPP. Vendor personnel consulting with consumers should possess adequate knowledge to advise consumers on program-approved equipment designed for each consumer's specific needs.

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Each vendor must sign and return the Protocols acceptance page at the end of this document, with the required attachments. The Commission may, for good cause, suspend an approved vendor's eligibility to redeem vouchers under the program.

## **The Objective of TEPP**

The objective of TEPP is to meet each consumer's specific telecommunications access needs with appropriate specialized equipment. Voucher maximum amounts are established based on common equipment purchases specific to that disability category. They do not represent a spending goal for the consumer. Vouchers are intended for the purchase of only the specific equipment needed for access to telecommunications.

## **Vendor Responsibilities**

A TEPP vendor is responsible for maintaining familiarity with the types of specialized telecommunications equipment approved for purchase with a TEPP voucher as well as the special needs associated with the category of voucher submitted for reimbursement. Vendors should contact the TEPP Administrator, Solix, at (844) 411-3861 or via e-mail [TEPP@solixinc.com](mailto:TEPP@solixinc.com) with any questions.

When consulting with a consumer, it is the vendor's responsibility to assist in identifying consumer needs and to identify the appropriate equipment for the consumer using a TEPP voucher. Independent Living Centers that maintain a wide variety of equipment on site for consumers to test and try out are a valuable resource for identifying consumer needs for appropriate telecommunications equipment.

## **Consumer Self-Certification of Disability**

A consumer with a disability may determine whether that disability presents a barrier to telecommunication access. The consumer shall determine what accommodations are needed to ensure effective telecommunications access.

When a provider, the fund administrator, a vendor, or the Commission has sound reason to question the self-certification made by a consumer, additional verification of disability may be requested. Additional verification can be provided by an appropriate medical professional's written diagnosis and description of physical limitations and special needs resulting from that diagnosis.

The fund administrator shall only make vouchers available to assist customers with a disability who have provided a special telecommunications needs certification that complies with the above.

## **Transfer of Vouchers between Vendors**

The Commission must approve any transfer of vouchers between vendors. All requests should be submitted via email to [TEPP@solixinc.com](mailto:TEPP@solixinc.com). The requests must include: (a) justification on why a transfer is necessary and (b) proof of the consumer's consent for transfer of the voucher to a different vendor.

The Commission reserves the right to deny reimbursement for transferred vouchers without pre-approval.

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## Eligible Equipment

The TEPP Voucher Eligible Equipment List of specialized telecommunications equipment (“Eligible Equipment List”) can be found at <https://psc.wi.gov/Documents/USF/TEPPequipment.pdf>.

Vendors should contact the TEPP Administrator at (844) 411-3861 or [TEPP@solixinc.com](mailto:TEPP@solixinc.com) with any questions or for further assistance.

## Pre-Approval Procedures for Equipment Not on the Eligible Equipment List

Pre-approval must be obtained from TEPP if a vendor intends to provide specialized telecommunications equipment that is not mentioned on the Eligible Equipment List that the vendor believes will be a good fit for a consumer. Pre-approval must be obtained each time a request for equipment not on the Eligible Equipment List is made. All requests should be submitted via email to [TEPP@solixinc.com](mailto:TEPP@solixinc.com) and must state what equipment is being proposed and why the particular equipment is needed by the particular consumer to access essential telephone service.

Specific reference to the individual’s disability and clear justification for the particular equipment must be made, including a description of how the requested equipment addresses his or her special needs in a manner that cannot be accomplished using TEPP-approved equipment that is on the Eligible Equipment List. This information is necessary for audit purposes.

Pre-approval requests should be made by someone who is familiar with specialized telecommunications equipment for the voucher recipient’s condition and who is working directly with the voucher recipient. A full independent assessment may be requested as further justification of the need for the equipment.

It is the vendor’s responsibility to verify that pre-approval has been obtained. Such requests should not come to the TEPP Administrator from the consumer directly.

Non-approved telecommunications equipment that is sold and shipped to consumers without pre-authorization **will not be reimbursed**.

## Equipment Pricing and Shipping

Equipment sold to consumers using a TEPP voucher must be provided at the manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP) or average retail market price. Mark-ups on equipment sold to TEPP voucher consumers will generally not be reimbursed. On a case-by-case basis, mark-ups may be reimbursed with approval from the TEPP Administrator. Any financial or business relationships between a vendor and an agent or supplier of equipment must be disclosed to the TEPP Administrator. Vendors should provide the TEPP Administrator with a Financial or Business Relationship Disclosure List of agents and suppliers with which the vendor has a financial or business relationship. Upon a change in any identified relationship, a vendor must notify the TEPP Administrator.

Reasonable shipping and handling charges may be reimbursed by TEPP. Only one handling charge may be reimbursed for an equipment purchase. Overnight shipping costs will not be reimbursable.

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## Marketing TEPP

Consumers must be informed that they have a right to choose both the equipment they purchase and the vendor they choose. Marketing that promotes a single product to many TEPP consumers undermines the objectivity and individual focus that the program must maintain in order to satisfy the requirements of the USF, including providing equipment that is specific to a consumer's telecommunications needs.

When consulting with a consumer, and before submitting an application on behalf of a consumer, the vendor must provide him or her with a list of TEPP vendors to ensure awareness of alternative telecommunications equipment sources. Each vendor must also keep on-site a copy of the completed application with the consumer's signature. The Commission and the State Legislative Audit Bureau maintain the right to inspect this documentation. Vendors must provide copies of marketing material to the program administrator on request.

- Other stipulations applicable to TEPP marketing include the following: Only Commission TEPP **unaltered** program applications and materials may be provided to the consumer. Additional vendor promotional materials that identify the vendor and contact information must be printed separately and can be appended to the Commission TEPP material.
- Marketing materials prepared by the vendor and relating to TEPP must clearly indicate that the equipment eligible for purchase is made available through the Wisconsin Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program funded by the Wisconsin Universal Service Fund.
- Any promotion of TEPP-related equipment purchases must clearly indicate that the program serves people with disabilities who need specialized equipment to access telecommunications.

## Voucher Submission Procedures When Using Medicare or Private Insurance

TEPP is "secondary" to both Medicare, Medicaid programs and private insurance. If a consumer using a TEPP voucher is covered by one or more of these programs, then TEPP will not pay before payment by these resources is applied. An invoice and Medicare, Medical Assistance, or private insurance Explanation of Benefits (EOB) must be submitted to show the amount(s) the primary (and secondary, if applicable) insurer has paid. TEPP will only allow the total amount billed, using MSRP as a guide, plus reasonable shipping and handling charges (see "Equipment Pricing").

## Submitting Online Applications on Behalf of Voucher Recipients

Vendors may submit online applications on behalf of individual consumers or retail outlets that lack internet access. In these cases, the vendor must keep on file a copy of the official TEPP paper application with the consumer's signature and abide by all applicable non-disclosure, privacy, and HIPPA regulations. This documentation may be requested at any time by the TEPP Administrator and must be provided within a reasonable timeframe. A copy of the TEPP paper application must be kept by the vendor for a minimum of three years.

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## Online Applications Requesting Vouchers Be Sent to an Alternative Location

In instances in which a consumer wishes to have a voucher sent to a location other than the voucher recipient's home address, the vendor must have written permission from the consumer. Vendors completing an on-line application on behalf of a consumer must have a copy of the official TEPP paper application with the consumer's signature and permission for the voucher to be sent to an alternative location. A copy of the TEPP paper application must be kept by the vendor for a minimum of three years.

## Filing for Reimbursement

Instructions for filing for reimbursement are listed on the back of the TEPP voucher. Vendors must accurately and thoroughly complete the sections applicable to them. The vendor must also ensure that the voucher is signed and dated.

The sales receipt or invoice for the equipment purchased must be submitted along with shipping and handling charges applicable to the sale (see "Equipment Pricing"). The original of the voucher must be sent to the TEPP Administrator as listed on the back of the voucher.

In the event that any voucher sections are not completed, correct documentation is not received, non-approved or over-priced equipment is submitted, or voucher and invoices do not tabulate correctly, the voucher and invoice will not be paid and will be returned to the vendor along with an explanation from the TEPP Administrator.

Each equipment item with the manufacturer and product or model number, if applicable, must be clearly outlined in legible writing or typed on the voucher.

All correctly completed invoices and vouchers received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month will be authorized for payment by the end of the month. Checks are generally sent to vendors during the first week of the following month.

TEPP must not be billed until the voucher recipient has received all of the TEPP-covered equipment. Vendors who provide equipment to their consumers in violation of these Protocols **do so at their own risk** as the program does not guarantee reimbursement.

## Program Controls

Information provided by TEPP vendors is subject to audit and verification by the Commission and State of Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau. Any attempt to intentionally defraud this program can result in legal action by the State of Wisconsin.

## Follow-up with Consumers

The Commission reserves the right to follow-up with consumers.

*(see next page for acceptance of Vendor Protocols)*

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## Acceptance of Vendor Protocols

Please indicate your receipt and understanding of these Protocols, as well as your agreement to abide by them, by signing and returning this acceptance page to the following address.

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin  
Attn: Billy Mauldin  
4822 Madison Yards Way, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Madison, WI 53705-9100

Alternatively, you can e-mail the scanned acceptance page in PDF format to [billy.mauldin@wisconsin.gov](mailto:billy.mauldin@wisconsin.gov).

**I am an authorized representative of the company listed below. I have received, understand, and agree to the Vendor Protocols for the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP).**

**The following documents, attached to this document, are true and accurate.**

- (1) Qualified Staff List**
- (2) List of State Equipment Distribution Programs or Organizations**
- (3) Training Narrative**
- (4) Financial Relationship Disclosure List**

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Company Name

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Authorized Representative  
Type or Print along with your signature

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Date

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Telephone Number

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E-Mail Address

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Website Address

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Mailing Address

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## Questions for TEPP Website and Mailers

If approved to be a TEPP vendor, you will be added to the WI TEPP Website as well as mailers that are distributed to approved applicants. In order for us to best assist applicants, please answer the following questions:

1) What type(s) of products does the company sell? (Check all that apply)

- Products for Hard of Hearing individuals (HH)
- Products for Deaf individuals (D)
- Products for Deaf-Blind individuals (DB)
- Products for Speech Impaired individuals (SI)
- Products for Deaf Low Vision individuals (DLV)
- Products for Mobility Impaired individuals (MI)

2) What type of vendor are you? (Check all that apply)

- A vendor with demonstration equipment & some stock available
- A vendor that can provide in home assistance to clients
- A vendor that provides consultation and orders the equipment
- A vendor that specializes in equipment for the mobility impaired
- A mail order vendor
- A vendor that specializes in equipment for deaf-blind & deaf-low vision consumers