# Missouri Assistive Technology Council

# 14 June 2024

# Drury Inn - Columbia

## 1. Call to Order

A. Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 AM by chairperson Chad Rohr. Members in attendance: Chip Hailey, Kim Reese, Paula Darr, Samantha Marsicovetere, Camille Anderson-Weddle, Shari LaRoussa, Jennifer Boedeker, Andrew Lackey, Shelly Brown, John Meeks, Rachel Baskerville. Staff: David Baker, Brenda Whitlock, Kristy Summers, Scout Merry, and Eileen Belton. Guests. Angelina Alpert.

B. Approval of June Agenda

The June Agenda was approved as submitted (Moton: Hailey; Second: Boedeker)

C. Approval of March Minutes

The minutes of the March meeting were approved as submitted (Motion: LaRoussa; Second: Lackey)

## 2. Directors Report

A. Council Update

 1. Ethics Commission

Appreciation to all members who were required to submit their yearly Financial Disclosure form to the Missouri Ethics Commission. Everyone had their materials submitted prior to the deadline.

 2. Membership Update

There are currently three vacant consumer slots on the Council. Kim Reese and John Meeks (both in attendance) have submitted the required paperwork and are awaiting action by the Boards and Commissions Office on their applications.

Also before the Boards and Commission Office are applications for Stacy Morse and Mary Ross, both agency representatives needing to be approved. Stacy will be representing the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council and is replacing Emily Hartley. Mary Ross is replacing Beth Dauber and will be representing Vocational Rehabilitation.

Since the last meeting, two emails have been sent to Board and Commissions encouraging them to act on the pending applications.

 3. Executive Board Election

In late July/early August, the annual Executive Board Election will take place. Three positions will need to be filled, including chair-elect, one agency representative and one consumer representative. Individuals were encouraged to nominate others or even themselves for inclusion on the ballot.

## 3. Current Activities

1. Power Up 2024

Brenda provided a recap of a very successful Power Up 2024. Overall, feedback about the conference was very positive. The conference drew 552 attendees and 72 exhibitors this year. Individuals representing either educational institutions or community living institutions comprised about 50% of all attendees, the remainder of individuals at the conference being individuals with disabilities or family members, from health and rehabilitation facilities and representatives of technology or employment. Roughly 15% of attendees identified as being a person with a disability or a family member or a person with a disability.

Post conference surveying showed that:

* 80% of attendees were very satisfied with the conference; this was up from 70% in 2023.
* 84% of individuals felt that their skills increased.
* 82% of respondents noted that they felt the number and variety of exhibitors was excellent.
* 95% of attendees felt that their knowledge of assistive technology devices and resources had increased.

A few items identified either through the survey or during staff’s post-conference debrief to focus on for next year included:

* Working with the hotel to further improve the quality and variety of food offerings, as well encouraging them to further improve their provision of audio visual equipment and related service.
* Retooling our conference marketing efforts, which were identified by staff as not quite as organized as in previous years.
* Further increasing conference accessibility.

2. Digital Inclusion Activities (David & Brenda)

Both Brenda and David have been active in this space over the last year. David’s focus has been on working with individuals with I/DD, their families and advocates to increase their skills and capacities in areas such as digital safety, digital literacy, access to the internet and awareness of assistive technology. In April, two Digital Day events were held in Joplin and in Arnold with one in the works in the St. Louis area to be held in the fall. Attention is also being focused on encouraging educators to include the development of digital skills as part of student preparation during the transition process. A related presentation will be unveiled during the Transition Training Institute at the end of June.

Brenda has been working with KC Digital Drive to help connect the individuals they serve to assistive technology through the inclusion of a variety of computer-based assistive devices into their training lab. The intent is to increase awareness of assistive technology and related services to those who may have disabilities, but are unaware of it. In addition, she has coordinated several VoiceOver Trainings across the state designed to increase the skills of low-vision and blind iDevice users.

Staff are also keeping an eye on the office of Broadband development in anticipation of funding opportunities via the state’s access to Digital Equity Act funds.

3. Library Displays

At the March meeting, it was shared that staff have been engaged in a creative outreach activity with libraries in the Kansas City area in which assistive technology displays are being put in various locations. Seen by scores of patrons each day, the displays are intended to increase awareness of assistive technology, especially as related to reading, and connect these individuals to our services. Displays have been set up in two locations thus far, with two more planned and several more in the works.

4. Cross Systems Technology Group

To galvanize and coordinate state and local efforts towards inclusion of assistive technology for all individuals with disabilities across the lifespan, the Cross Systems Technology group has been developed. The group is composed of individuals and organizations who have some focus on assistive technology or are interested in increasing their assistive technology services and provides them with a platform for collective action, advocacy and education to ensure assistive technology is understood, incorporated, and practiced as a part of the disability service environment. Put differently, that assistive technology and related services are “built-in” not an “add-on”.

The group meets every other month and is currently identifying additional interested parties and establishing activities to coalesce around.

5. Master Plan on Aging

David has been participating in the development of the state’s Master Plan on Aging, a cross-sector plan to transform the infrastructure and coordination of services for the state’s rapidly aging population as well as those with developmental disabilities.

MoAT was assigned to the Housing and Aging in Place workgroup, which recently completed its work and presented it for further consideration to the larger committee. While prioritizing access to assistive technology, health related technology and remote monitoring technologies did not make it into the groups’ recommendations, they did include an emphasis on increasing universally designed housing and environment. Work towards the state’s final master plan is continuing.

6. Summer Work Students

Staff is welcoming to our offices this summer two high school students who are participating in the summer internship program for students with disabilities. Student participants are working on the development of their job readiness skills through their participation in the program and are provided with a Job Coach to assist them. The program lasts for 6 weeks and is being coordinated through our local Easter Seals program.

7. Training and Outreach Activities

Staff have been engaged in a wide variety of training and outreach activities across the state. Highlights include:

* The Institute for Human Development’s (IHD) Charting the Lifecourse Showcase held in Kansas City at the end of April. MoAT was asked to participate in a keynote presentation and also had an extensive exhibit of assistive technology for participants to visit.
* Brenda represented us at RSB’s Children's Vision Summit and Scout participated in the MOKA Conference.
* Stacy is teaming up with T-Mobile Accessibility and is working on a forthcoming training geared toward seniors wanting to learn the basics of how to use their smartphones. She also dabbled in a speed networking event held locally that has led to additional public outreach events and several individuals making contact with our services for the first time.
* David was asked to provide a session on device loan programs and device reuse programs as part of a national initiative between Tech Act Programs and state leaders of special education to increase collaboration.
* In addition staff continue to partner with IHD on the monthly Missouri Open Door AT series and also the on-going Information Communication Technology series.

Upcoming events include participation at the Missouri Rehabilitation Associations Conference, the Transition Training Institute hosted by DESE, the APSE MO conference and several other events.

## 4. AT Spotlight

1. Apple’s Built-In Accessibility Features

Brenda provided a comprehensive overview of the numerous and varied accessibility features found in Apple’s computers, tablets and phones. Increasingly mainstream computer companies are universally designing devices and including often effective and adequate assistive solutions that are always as well known to individuals as they need to be.

**5. Policy and Practice**

1. Affordable Connectivity Program

During the pandemic, as a means to help low-income households afford broadband internet access, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program that later morphed into the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP offered eligible households a discount on broadband service and was a highly successful program. Unfortunately, earlier this year, the ACP was discontinued leaving many households, including many with members who have a disability, struggling to afford broadband access again.

In the wake of the demise of the ACP, individuals are searching for other alternatives to help offset the cost of broadband access. Various broadband carriers have stepped up to fill the gap and information was shared on two of the better resources: [Everyone On](https://www.everyoneon.org/) and [NDIA](https://www.digitalinclusion.org/low-cost-internet-plans/). Both sites have search tools that can direct individuals to carriers in their areas that provide a broadband subsidy. In addition, at the federal level, the [Lifeline Program](https://www.lifelinesupport.org/) is also providing a slight monthly benefit to help offset the cost of Broadband.

Members were encouraged to become more familiar with these options and keep them in mind if individuals they are working with are struggling to stay connected.

1. U.S. Department of Education: AT Myths and Facts Document

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Education released an [AT Myths and Facts document](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/Myths-and-Facts-Surrounding-Assistive-Technology-Devices-01-22-2024.pdf), a resource designed to clarify common misconceptions about assistive technology in education. The document presents a list of “myths” about AT in schools followed by the “facts” to correct those misconceptions. The goal is to provide accurate information to educators, parents, and other stakeholders, ensuring that students who need assistive technology receive appropriate support. It often covers topics such as the definition of AT, the process for obtaining AT, the legal rights of students, and how AT can be used effectively in different educational settings.By addressing these myths, the document helps to promote a better understanding of the importance and role of assistive technology in creating an inclusive educational environment.

1. Updated Digital Accessibility Standards

A function of the Council is to ensure that the state of Missouri complies with federal information communication accessibility laws and standards. This includes making sure that the state of Missouri adopts the most current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

The last update to the standards was in 2017 when the state adopted the WCAG 2.0 A/AA standards. The standards have been updated to WCAG 2.1 and in April the Department of Justice published the final rules related to the standards.

Eileen provided background on and an overview of the new standards. At the September meeting additional discussion will take place, as will a vote on their adoption by the state of Missouri.

## 6. Program Data and Updates

 1. Demonstration and Reutilization

Scout shared some select highlights about the demonstration and reutilization centers across the state. All the centers are chugging along with the majority near or having achieved their yearly goals for demonstrations, device reutilization or both. He went on to mention that we have established another demonstration center at the offices of KC Digital Drive in Kansas City. This relationship is utilizing the model we are trying to shift the demonstration centers to by providing equipment instead of funds in return for data. For the state fiscal year thus far, demonstrations are nearing last year’s total and device re-utilization has topped over a million dollars in savings to Missourians, underscoring again the value of that program to consumers.

Members were also reminded that at the September meeting we will be discussing the yearly goals and funding levels for the demonstration and reutilization centers.

 2. TAP for Telephone and Wireless

In Stacy’s absence, David noted that year-to-date TAP for Telephone and TAP for Wireless numbers are on par with last year. These programs have leveled out in terms of the number of individuals served over the last few years and Stacy is actively working to increase public awareness about both programs in an effort to increase their access by the community.

 3. TAP for Internet/DeafBlind Equipment Program

 No report

 4. ATR and ETC

The Assistive Technology Reimbursement Program (ATR) for schools wrapped up another successful year having provided over 290 students with assistive technology to unlock educational opportunities. Staff anticipate being able to offer the program again in the 2024-25 school year.

ETC, the device loan program, continues to be highly accessed and year-to-date has exceeded last year's numbers in terms of devices borrowed and total borrowers.

 5. Show-Me Loans / KAT / MFP

Eileen noted that thus far in state fiscal year 2024, the Show-Me Loans Program has provided over half a million dollars in loans to individuals across the state. Accessible vehicles, hearing related assistive technology and home modifications comprise the bulk of the loans made. She shared historical information on the last 5-years of the program noting certain trends in access related to the state of the economy.

She went on to note that the Kids Assistive Technology Program (KAT) will show an increase in the number of children and families who have been able to have devices funded through the program this year. Mobility, seating and positioning aids being the leading items requests are received for.

Our partnership with the Money Follows the Person (MFP) Program to provide an AT option for individuals who need it to transition successfully to their own homes has been placing an emphasis on educating the various sub-contractors around the state helping to implement the transition process. This is in response to primarily staff changes among the sub-contractors and their need to understand how to address the assistive technology needs of those they work with.

## 7. Action Items

None

## 8. New Business

None

## 9. Announcements

The next meeting will also be an in-person meeting and held on September 13th in Jefferson City at the Courtyard by Marriott.

## 10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 PM (Motion: LaRoussa; Second: Hailey).