# **Missouri Assistive Technology Advisory Council Meeting**

# **7 March 2025**

# **Virtual**

## **1. Call to Order**

A. Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM by chairperson, Chip Hailey. Members in attendance: Rachel Baskerville, Jennifer Boedeker, Melinda Bridge, Shelly Brown, Andrew Lackey, Shari LaRoussa, Aaron Luna, Samantha Marsicovetere, Lisa Meisenheimer, Stacy Morse, Kim Reese, Chad Rohr, Mary Ross and Gary Wunder. Guests in attendance: Angelina Albert. Staff in attendance: David Baker, Stacy Brady, Scout Mary, Kara Adams and Elaine Houtman.

B. Approval of March Agenda

The agenda of the March meeting was approved as presented (Motion: Rohr; Second: LaRoussa)

C. Approval of December Minutes

The minutes of the December meeting were approved as presented (Motion: LaRoussa; Second: Rohr).

## **2. Directors Report**

A. Council Update

1. Boards and Commissions

David reached out to Keri Stuart, the new director of the Boards and Commissions Office. He shared with her information about the need for appointments to the Council, a current roster of members, and the names of individuals whose applications were pending at the end of the Parson Administration. He has not received any response from Keri.

2. Ethics Commission

Appreciation was expressed to those who have already submitted their required Personal Financial Disclosure Form to the Ethics Commission. For those who are yet to make their submission, a reminder that it is due by May 1st. If anyone has questions, please reach out to David.

B. Staff Update

1. New Hire: Elaine Houtman

Elaine Houtman has joined the MoAT staff filling the position formerly held by Eileen Belton. Elaine began on March 1st and will initially be handling the Show-Me Loans, KAT and MFP programs. Elaine worked at MoAT approximately 15 years ago. She has an extensive familiarity with Tech Act Programs and in assistive technology and related services.

C. Federal Update

1 AT Act Funding

The Trump administration has implemented a range of changes to federal agencies aimed at reshaping the scope and priorities of government operations. Thus far, the changes have not negatively impacted the Tech Act Programs, who are overseen at the federal level by the Association of Community Living housed within the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Focus currently is on the passage by the House and Senate of a Continuing Resolution (CR) that will address funding for the remainder of federal fiscal year 2025. Passage of the CR will prevent any disruption to operations or gap in funding.

D. State Budget

1. House and Senate Budget Hearings

The Missouri legislature has begun the process of crafting the state budget for FY ‘26, which begins on July 1, 2025. MoAT’s budget requests are included within the overall budget for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Thus far, both the House and the Senate have conducted their budget hearings. There were no questions from either chamber about MoAT’s request. In other words, so far so good. A request to increase by $200,000 the appropriation amount for the AT Trust Fund was included in MoAT’s request. The final budget has to be passed by both chambers by Friday, May 9th.

E. AT3 Leadership Symposium

David will be attending the AT3 Leadership Symposium in Albuquerque, New Mexico from March 9th through March 12th. This is the first time it has been held outside of Washington D.C. and the first time MoAT has attended in the last couple of years due to the event having conflicted with Power Up.

## **3. Current Activities**

1. Dementia Caregiver Program

Since taking on the program this past fall, staff have been actively engaged in receiving and attending to requests for assistive technologies to help in the caregiving process for individuals with memory loss. To date, over 200 applications have been received. Each applicant is contacted and a review of their situation and discussion about potential technology options occurs. Once items are identified, MoAT purchases and provides them to the families. David provided a brief overview of the variety of items being purchased through the program for families. Items include cameras, door sensors, fall alerts, medication dispensers and a variety of similar technologies.

2. ICT Training

With Eileen’s retirement, Brenda has picked up and carried forward the ICT initiatives. On February 19th, a Zoom training focused on the new WCAG 2.1 requirements was held with 79 individuals registering, several of whom were from school districts and non-governmental agencies, groups targeted to reach this year. In addition, an in-person Web Accessibility Day is scheduled to be held on April 24th in Jefferson City. Stay tuned for further details. Finally, staff have been creating and posting to the MoAT YouTube Channel short videos on important accessibility elements such as creation of Alt Tags, Color Contrast, etc.

## **4. Program Data and Updates**

1. Annual Performance Report Year-over-Year Comparison

In late December, the required Annual Performance Report is submitted to the Association for Community Living. David provided the members with a review of final federal year program numbers and a comparison of federal fiscal year ‘24 outcomes to federal fiscal year ‘23. Overall, most programs reported increases in individuals served and/or devices provided. Some notable highlights included Show-Me Loans increasing both the number of loans made and dollars loaned, the Assistive Technology Reimbursement Program increasing the number of students served and dollars allocated to assistive technology, and there was a notable uptick in the number of device demonstrations provided across the state. New to the report this year was information on the number of 3D printed items distributed and the cost-savings to consumers through this service. All Tech Act data is compiled and available for review on the [CATADA](https://catada.info/) website. This site is also a useful tool for states to compare their performance against their peers.

1. Demo and Re-utilization Spotlight

As a refresher, Scout provided an overview of both the device demonstration centers and the device re-utilization sites. He reviewed locations, purpose, differences in structure and staff, and shared photos from several of the locations.

1. TAP for Telephone and Wireless

Stacy reported that overall TAP-Wireless is holding steady and a comparison of year-to-date numbers for the current and prior state fiscal years was shared.

TAP for Telephone continues to present challenges. While still incredibly useful to many in the state, the ever decreasing number of land-line telephones, turnover in support staff throughout the state, and a continuing decrease in the types of equipment available to offer through the program all are headwinds the program faces.

1. TAP for Internet/DeafBlind Equipment Program

TAP for Internet has shown a nearly 20% increase in the number of individuals served when compared to the similar timeframe a year ago. Approximately 130 individuals have been assisted and around 260 devices provided. Devices most often provided via the program are ZoomText and JAWS software, and Braille displays.

iCanConnect is also trending upward this state fiscal year.

1. ATR and ETC

All funds for the Assistive Technology Reimbursement Program have been obligated for this school year with 314 applications being approved. In all, over $980,000 was requested through the program by districts across the state. As in years past, the amount of requests exceeded the amount of funds available.

Kara also shared the results of a recently conducted survey focused on past recipients and the status of their devices. Of note in the survey findings was that the majority of devices are still being used by the students a year, two years on. This is certainly encouraging. We’d also hoped to parse out information concerning the transfer of devices when students change schools or graduate, but not enough data was available to give a clear picture of what is occurring in such situations.

The device loan program, ETC, continues to see increased demand, with nearly 400 more devices sent out at this point in the year as compared to last. The number of borrowers also continues to increase. Kara highlighted a variety of new items that have been or will be added to the program over the next couple of months. Items to be added include both new items on the market and items to be added to increase inventory and reduce wait times.

1. Show-Me Loans / KAT / MFP

David shared that prior to Eileen retiring, she had successfully wrapped up the KAT Program and expanded all its funds for this year. MFP has been extremely slow throughout January and February, which seems tied to the weather with most individuals being inclined to wait for better weather before transitioning from a nursing home to community living. With Elaine being hired, Show-Me Loans is fully functional again.

## **5. AT Spotlight**

1. Amplified Stethoscopes

Assistive technology can be extremely useful for helping individuals achieve and maintain employment in a variety of areas. One specific area is the medical profession where skilled medical professionals often face challenges as a result of hearing loss and may struggle to use a standard stethoscope. Fortunately, amplified stethoscopes and related tools can help ameliorate this situation. Stacy shared, described, compared and contrasted several amplified stethoscopes currently on the market and available in the device loan library.

## **6. New Business**

1. Section 504 Lawsuit

Missouri is one of 17 states that are currently suing to rule Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act unconstitutional. The suit, Texas vs. Becerra, is concerning to many individuals with disabilities and their advocates since Section 504 is a landmark piece of disability rights legislation and is the underpinning for the Americans with Disabilities Act. A response to this lawsuit and in what manner was a point of discussion among the members. Upon discussion, it was decided to advance to the full Council a motion to write a letter to Missouri Attorney General Bailey expressing the Council’s opposition to the lawsuit and express concern over the potential negative impacts the elimination of Section 504 might have on the disability community.

1. EDGAR Rules

When students with disabilities who use assistive technology graduate from school or transfer from one school district to another, their assistive technology often does not go with them. It remains with their former school. Not only does the student lose their assistive technology, it also creates a scenario in which the receiving environment has to seek to replace the assistive technology.

The EDGAR rules under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are the cause behind this conundrum.

This long-standing hindrance to seamless access to assistive technology is ripe for addressing and efforts to raise its profile and seek some means of getting the EGAR rules updated to allow the smooth transition of assistive devices for students will be pursued.

## **7. Announcements**

Mary Ross announced that Karen Klienke retired from VR at the end of the year. Mary was chosen to assume Karen’s responsibilities as director of assistive technology and rehabilitation services and Sarah Diehl was promoted to assistant director.

Stacy gave a quick update on the library displayed which are averaging 1 to 2 new displays going up each month at a variety of locations around the state.

Chip shared information about [The Blind and Low Vision Community of Missouri](https://www.blindlowvisionmo.org/), a new non-profit organization dedicated to supporting individuals with blindness and low vision across Missouri.

As a reminder, the June Council meeting will be held on June 6th in Columbia. Additional information forthcoming.

## **8. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 PM by unanimous voice vote (Motion: LaRoussa; Second: Rohr).