**Missouri Assistive Technology Council Minutes**

**8 March 2023**

**Virtual**

**1. Call to Order**

Chairperson Chad Rohr called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

A. Introductions

Members in attendance: Chad Rohr, Andrew Lackey, Lisa Meisenheimer, Stacy Morse, Paula Darr, Chip Hailey, Samantha Marsicovetere, Pam Arbeiter, Shelly Brown, Camille Anderson-Weddle, Sarah Becker, Kim Reese. Staff in attendance: Stacy Brady, Brenda Whitlock, Eileen Belton, Kara Adams, Felicia George, Kris Rooff. Guests in attendance: None.

B. Approval of March Agenda

The agenda for the March meeting was approved as presented (Motion: Hailey; Second: Meisenheimer)

C. Approval of December Minutes

The minutes from the December meeting were approved as submitted (Motion:Arbeiter; Second: Hailey)

**2. Directors Report**

A. Council Update

 1. Ethics Commission

Members were reminded that if they have been officially appointed by Boards and Commissions to the Council they must file and submit to the Missouri Ethics Commission a Personal Financial Disclosure form by the May 1st deadline. All members to whom this applies should have received a letter from the Ethics Commission with related information shortly after the first of the year. Anyone who did not receive the letter or who has questions or concerns is encouraged to reach out to David directly.

 2. Membership Update

Both Emily Hartley (representing MODDC) and Beth Dauber (representing VR) have resigned from the Council. In both cases due to job changes. This brings to three the total number of agency representative seats needing a new official appointment from the Boards and Commissions Office. The third being the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Both VR and MODDC have identified a replacement (Mary Ross and Stacy Morse respectively) and submitted the necessary paperwork for appointment to the Boards and Commissions Office. The Division of Developmental Disabilities is currently being represented by Shelly Brown and the process of preparing the necessary paperwork is in process.

In addition, there are several open consumer seats on the Council. Recently, Kim Reese submitted her application as a consumer representative and is awaiting action by the Boards and Commissions Office.

 3. Agency Representative Vacancy on Executive Board

Both agency representative slots on the Executive Board are vacant as a result of Beth and Emily stepping aside. According to the by laws, the Executive Board can appoint an individual to fill the remainder of the term of the vacated office, which would be for only the June meeting. David encouraged any agency representatives to reach out if they are interested in filling one of the open slots.

B. Administrative Issues

1. Public Service Commission Relay Fund Activity

In August of 2023, MoAT received correspondence from the Public Service Commission (PSC) regarding the continuation of the Relay Missouri Fund and concerning an adjustment to the surcharge rate. The latter is a normal bi-annual activity, but the issue of continuing the Relay Missouri Fund was a complete surprise since they indicated the potential of completely eliminating the fund. In the ensuing months, MoAT staff have been in contact with the PSC regarding this issue.

An update provided by the PSC to MoAT announced that they have withdrawn their intent to consider phasing out the Relay Missouri Fund. This is extremely welcome news since had they taken action, it could have essentially ended MoAT’s ability to operate the Telecommunications Access Program and been disruptive to individuals reliant on the Relay Service for communication.

Two other issues of note covered in the correspondence from the PSC to MoAT included an adjustment to the Relay Surcharge and the discontinuation of Analog CapTel Service. By statute, every two years the Relay Surcharge is reviewed and adjusted in a manner intended to balance income with expenses. Two years ago, it was raised to $.10 per line. Upon review, the PSC is recommending it be decreased to $.06 per line for the next two years. This should have no negative effect on the Telecommunication Access Program. The discontinuation of the Analog CapTel Service is an adjustment that reflects changes in technology and it too has no direct impact on consumers or MoAT.

2. Federal Budget

Congress is yet to pass a final Federal Fiscal Year 2025 budget. MoAT’s core funding comes via federal funds, namely through the Health and Human Services appropriation bill. As in years past, Congress has passed short-term Continuing Resolutions to keep the government funded as they continue to negotiate the final budget bill. This is more a frustration for Tech Act Programs than it is a concern and the most likely scenario when all is said and done is that the Tech Act Programs will be level funded at their 2024 level.

3. State Budget

Simultaneously, the Missouri legislature is crafting the state's fiscal year 2025 budget. The process began earlier than years past with the initial hearing in the House being held in December. Additional budget hearings both in the House and the Senate are anticipated. MoAT’s budget request is part of the overall budget for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. No issues with our budget request as submitted are anticipated since we receive no general revenue funds.

**3. Current Activities**

1. Power Up 2024

As Power Up 2024 fast approaches, Brenda provided an update on where things stand with approximately a month to go.

* Attendee registration is a tad slower then at this time last year, but still looking great at 445.
* With 72 Exhibitors registered, all the available exhibitor slots have been filled.
* There will be a total of 56 sessions available to attendees with the sessions being divided into strands based on areas of interest (i.e. education, AT for visually impaired, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, etc.).
* Extremely pleased to have presenters from the Texas Lighthouse for the Blind and from the Pacer Center in Minnesota at this year's conference, in addition to the many excellent speakers from within Missouri’s own border.
* Sam Seevy - creator of the Blind Life YouTube channel - will be the keynote speaker at the end of the conference. Sam was a well received session presenter last year.
* Overall, conference preparation is coming along well and anticipation is building.

The cost of registration, reasonable travel expenses and of hotel rooms are covered for all Council members and we hope to see as many of you there as can make it.

2. New Website

Eileen toured those in attendance through our new and greatly improved [website](https://at.mo.gov/) which went live as of February 15th. Improving the website has been long on the list. The new site utilizes Wordpress and will provide staff not only with greater control for more timely updating, but gives a wider array of fonts, colors, etc. to improve the site's attractiveness. Key changes include a banner across the top for quicker access to information and services, as well as the inclusion of a link out to the AT3 Center’s Explore AT website, an excellent overall resource on devices.

3. Digital Inclusion Activities

Staff have been active in the digital inclusion sphere. Internet access, digital skills, digital literacy, and digital safety impact the use of assistive technology for people with a wide range of disabilities and making sure that as many people with disabilities as possible are on the “right” side of the digital divide is critical in ensuring increased educational, vocational and community living opportunities.

David has been working with the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council on increasing digital knowledge and skills for individuals with Developmental Disabilities through a series of in-person trainings known as Digital Days. Digital Day events were recently held in Troy, Hannibal and Macon and were all well attended with individuals with I/DD being the overwhelming majority of attendees at all three events.

Brenda has been working with KC Digital Drive in a variety of capacities to make them more aware of issues faced by folks with disabilities when it comes to digital access. Currently in the works is the establishment of an assistive technology demonstration center at their training location in Kansas City. This partnership is intended to increase knowledge about assistive technology solutions for individuals attending KC Digital Drive events and also helping individuals themselves make connections between barriers they face due to a disability and ways AT can help them overcome the barrier and use computers and the internet more effectively.

4. AT Academy

MoAT and the Institute for Human Development (IHD) have been collaborating on the development of an AT Academy. The AT Academy is designed to increase knowledge and understanding about assistive technology and related services to a wider audience that includes not only individuals and family members, but agencies, organizations and others for whom assistive technology is an increasing element of their work. The Academy will officially launch in April via presentations at Power Up and also at IHD’s Charting the LIfecourse Conference.

5. MoAT Presentations at ATIA

Both Brenda and Scout submitted, were accepted and presented at the ATIA Conference in Florida in January. This is quite an impressive honor since ATIA is considered by many to be the leading international conference on assistive technology. Brenda’s presentation was entitled “Making Technology Easy for Grandpa” and focused on computer technology for seniors and others with little to no computer background. It was part of the conference’s aging strand. Scout’s presentation was also part of the aging strand and focused on AT for the kitchen. In addition, he was a co-presenter in two other sessions, as well as assisting in the conference’s AT Maker events. Attendance at ATIA is beneficial beyond just doing presentations since it enables exposure and networking to other leaders in the AT fields and to AT vendors.

6. Library Display

During a visit to the local library, Stacy noted the availability of a display case for community organizations and inquired about doing an AT/MoAT display, which they agreed to. The tandem of Stacy, Scout and Felicia worked to design and install the display which was well received and has led to other libraries in the system inquiring about having the display set up in their branches.

7. Master Plan on Aging

MoAT continues to participate in the development of the Governor’s Master Plan on Aging as a member of the Housing and Aging in Place Subcommittee. The subcommittee has wrapped up its work and submitted its recommendations to the larger committee.

8. Training and Outreach Activities

Staff have been actively engaged in the community via training and outreach activities. These include. In addition to items mentioned above, Vocational Rehabilitation’s new counselor training, participation at events in Kirksville and Farmington and the Missouri Open Door webinar series. Future events include the Charting the Lifecourse Showcase, Missouri Rehabilitation Association conference, Children’s Vision Summit and DESE’s Transition Training Institute.

B. Program Data and Updates

 1. Demonstration and Reutilization

It was shared that both the demonstration centers and the reuse centers are trending in a very positive direction. Post pandemic, the demonstration centers were slow in terms of individuals coming in to receive device information and demonstrations. Year-to-date, the number of demonstrations conducted are up nearly 100 and the number of individuals taking advantage of demonstration services is up around 130 individuals. An increase in demonstration of vision, computer and environmental control devices is also occurring. In terms of the reuse centers, year-to-date they have saved Missourians over $900,000 versus the cost of purchasing new devices.

 2. TAP for Telephone and Wireless

TAP-T and TAP-W numbers thus far this year are a bit sluggish in part due to high turnover of staff in the various locations around the state that provide consumer support for the program. Stacy is working through those issues as new staff come on board. She did note that there has been an uptick in the number of telecommunications accessories (i.e. alerting devices, amplifiers) provided through both programs and shared that the TAP-W program has begun providing wireless chargers since individuals were experiencing difficulty with inserting chargers into the base of phones.

 3. TAP for Internet/DeafBlind Equipment Program

Brenda shared the numbers year to date for TAP-I, which are similar to this time last year. The increasing array of built-in accessibility features included in devices is, on one hand, a great thing, it, on the other, does somewhat lessen the number of stand-alone devices individuals need to seek out. Brenda noted that she is spending more time with individuals explaining and showing them how to access these features as a result.

The DeafBlind Equipment Program is anticipated to be similar to last year in terms of devices provided and individuals served. Considerable time, unfortunately, has been drawn away from serving individuals and focused on challenges being experienced by the program’s new centralized database that the funder requires states to use.

 4. ATR and ETC

Both the number of devices loaned and number of individuals borrowing devices are noticeably up this year, Kara pointed out. She credits this to the outreach efforts staff have undertaken that increase awareness of the loan program. The ETC lab has also been seeing a lot of visitors who come in to tour the available devices and learn about the process for borrowing.

The Assistive Technology Reimbursement Program (ATR) is no longer taking applications for the current school year. Though 364 applications totalling nearly $890,000 were submitted, budgetary constraints only allowed for the approval of 299 applications totalling nearly $672,680 in funds to help school districts offset the purchase of AT for students.

 5. Show-Me Loans / KAT / MFP

The number of accessible vehicle loans provided over the past year has nearly doubled and totals nearly $440,000 in funds provided through the Show-Me Loans program this year. Due to program limitations, capping vehicle loans during this state fiscal year may need to occur.

Eileen went on to share that thus far 16 applications have been approved for families and children through the Kids Assistive Technology Program (KAT). Equally exciting is that the Department of Social Services is working to provide the program with additional funds for this year.

Emphasis in the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program has been on supporting providers in identifying areas of assistive technology they may wish to consider as they assist individuals in transitioning into the community.

**3. Action Items**

None

**4. New Business**

David mentioned the U.S. The Department of Education recently published updated guidance on the provision of assistive technology. Entitled [Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/Myths-and-Facts-Surrounding-Assistive-Technology-Devices-01-22-2024.pdf), the document underscores the Department of Education’s renewed focus on AT in public schools.

Stacy informed everyone that the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which helped qualified individuals offset the cost of internet access and was established during the pandemic, has ended. This is noteworthy because of the negative impact it will have for a significant number of individuals with disabilities who utilized it to make the internet more affordable and to help them bridge the digital divide.

**5. Announcements**

Next meeting will be in-person on June 14th in Columbia at the Drury Plaza East.

**6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 AM by unanimous voice vote (Motion: Marsicovetere; Second: Lackey).