# Missouri Assistive Technology Council

# 12 September 2024

# In-Person - Jefferson City

## 1. Call to Order

### A. Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 PM by chairperson Chip Hailey. Members in attendance: Paula Darr, Chad Rohr, Samantha Marsicovetere, Lisa Meisenheimer, Aaron Luna, Mary Ross, Melinda Bridge, Pam Arbeiter, Kim Reese, Andrew Lackey, Jennifer Boedeker, Stacy Morse, Gary Wunder, Rachel Baskerville and Shelly Brown. Staff in attendance: Brenda Whitlock, Scout Merry, Stacy Brady, Kara Adams, Eileen Belton, Kris Rooff and Felicia George.

### B. Approval of September Agenda

The agenda as presented was approved by unanimous voice vote (Motion: Rohr; Second: Lackey).

### C. Approval of June Minutes

The minutes of the June meeting were approved as presented by unanimous voice vote (Motion: Rohr; Second: Lackey).

## 2. Directors Report

### A. Council Update

#### Executive Board Election Results

Changes to the Executive Board have occurred as a result of the election held in August. Andrew Lackey was elected chair-elect and Char Rohr has moved to past chairperson. In addition, Jennifer Boedeker was elected to fill the open consumer representative slot and Stacy Morse was elected to the open agency representative slot. Lisa Meisenheimer, who was a consumer representative, moves off the Executive Board.

The full composition of the Executive Board for the next year is as follows:

Chairperson: Chip Hailey

Chair-Elect: Andrew Lackey

Past-Chair: Chad Rohr

Consumer Representatives: Jennifer Boedeker & Rachel Baskerville

Agency Representatives: Stacy Morse and Samantha Marsicovetere.

#### Membership Update

Melinda Bridge was welcomed to the Council. Melinda replaces Sarah Becker and will represent Missouri HealthNet, one of the required agency representatives on the Council.

With the addition of Melinda, the Council now has 5 individuals with applications either in-process or awaiting action by the Boards and Commissions Office. Other applications in play include those of Stacy Morse, Mary Ross, Kim Reese and John Meeks.

Repeated outreach to the Boards and Commissions Office has occurred with no positive outcomes. It is looking increasingly likely that all pending applications will not be acted upon until the new governor is sworn in.

#### Annual Report

Prior to the end of each calendar year, the Council is required via its statute to submit an annual report to the governor and legislature. Work on this year’s report is underway and a rough draft will be presented to the members at the December meeting.

## 3. Current Activities

#### 1. KC Digital Drive (Brenda & Scout)

MoAT has partnered with KC Digital Drive, an organization focused on digital equity for underserved populations in the Kansas City area. This collaboration enables MoAT to reach more urban, low-income, and unhoused individuals with assistive technology (AT). KC Digital Drive is also serving as a new demonstration site, providing access to computers, accessibility devices, and digital training resources in a central, accessible location.

KC Digital Drive is also leading a significant regional grant effort, involving 28 organizations from Missouri and Kansas, to secure national funding for digital equity. This grant would support digital access and training across the region. The collaboration also includes Rockhurst University, creating a layered support network across Kansas City, as each site offers unique services and expertise.

#### 2. Area Agencies on Aging 3D Printing Project

In an effort to connect seniors with assistive technology, especially low-tech aids to daily living, Scout is working to engage Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) through the provision of 3D-printed toolkits. Each Area Agency on Aging received a toolkit that contains eight low-tech devices to assist with common household tasks (opening bottles, squeezing tubes, clipping nails, etc.) that are often areas of difficulty as a result of aging. In addition, the kits include a usage guide with device descriptions and instructions. The kits were introduced at the MA4 conference where they were well received. The intended outcomes of this effort are to help seniors learn about assistive devices, realize that solutions don’t have to be high-tech or expensive, and strengthen ties between MoAT and the AAA’s.

#### 3. Assistive Technology Reimbursement Program

Kara shared that the Assistive Technology Reimbursement (ATR) program received $700,000 from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the 2024-25 school year. As of mid-August, 178 applications have been submitted, with roughly 90 applications approved thus far. The purpose of the program is to help school districts offset the cost of purchasing assistive technology for students on an IEP who have assistive technology specified in their IEP. Reimbursements range from $350 to $6,000 per student depending on need and covers a wide range of assistive technologies related to education (i.e. augmentative communication devices, braille devices, magnifiers, assistive listening devices, etc.). The program, which began in 2001, continues to be a valuable resource for districts statewide.

#### 4. Library Displays

Stacy updated the members on the evolution of our partnership with libraries to increase awareness of assistive technology. The third display was set up at the Midwest Genealogical Center in Independence. This display is a bit different in that it incorporates assistive technology across the ages, which is in keeping with the center’s focus on history. Additional displays in Cass County and in Blue Springs are scheduled for later in the year.

#### 5. Let’s Talk ICT Series

Eileen overviewed the latest upcoming installments in the Let’s Talk ICT series. A new seven-part series is underway that focuses on teaching participants on how to use various assistive technologies to test website accessibility. ZoomText (screen magnification), Dragon (voice input), and VoiceOver (screen reader) are among the items that participants will learn to use as part of the testing process. The training will be reinforced by the availability of three testing kits digital content developers can check out and utilize for testing their work, thus helping to ensure full accessibility.

#### 6. Summer Work Students (David)

At the June meeting it was noted that MoAT was hosting two local high school students with disabilities as part of a summer work experience program. Each participant worked 20 hours a week, Monday through Friday, for six weeks and were paid for their work. One of the participants enjoyed his experience so much that he continued his time with MoAT in a volunteer capacity until school began in mid-August. Overall, this was an extremely positive experience for both staff and the students.

#### 7. ACL Site Visit (David)

Rob Groendendahl, who oversees the Tech Act Programs at the federal level, did a site visit of the Missouri and Kansas programs at the end of July. During his time with the MoAT, he met staff, learned more about programs and services and visited a demonstration and reutilization partner in Columbia.

#### 8. Training and Outreach Activities (David)

Staff have been actively engaged statewide, delivering training sessions, participating in community outreach events, and presenting at conferences. A partial list of events since the last meeting include the Missouri Rehabilitation Association, the Transition Training Institute, the Family Caregiver Retreat, and the Adult Protective Services conference. In addition, Missouri Assistive Technology will be highlighted in an upcoming episode of the Accessibility podcast. Cumulatively, participation in events across the state helps to showcase programs and services, as well as raise awareness of assistive technology and its value across the lifespan.

#### 9. Power Up 2025 (David)

For 26 years, MoAT has hosted the Power Up conference. After considerable reflection, the decision was made to take a hiatus from holding the conference in 2025. Key factors in the decision included anticipated staff retirements in coming months, challenges with finding an acceptable location in central Missouri, and an overall desire to re-think the conference’s focus, audience drawn, and sessions offered in an effort to make it more reflective of the changing assistive technology landscape.

## 4. New Initiatives

#### Dementia Caregiver Program

MoAT will begin a collaboration with the Bureau of Senior Services and Community Asset Builders to match caregivers with appropriate assistive technologies to aid in the caregiving process of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias as part of the Missouri Caregiver Program.

## 5. AT Spotlight

### AT for Mental Wellness (David)

AT Spotlight was postponed for a future meeting due to time constraints.

## 6. Action Items

### Approval of 2024-2025 demo & reutilization contracts

Prior to the start of each federal fiscal year, which begins on October 1st, the contracts for the demonstration and reuse centers MoAT supports around the state are reviewed, adjusted, and approved by the Council. A table that outlined the proposed goals for the upcoming year and amounts to be awarded was shared in advance.

There are currently 10 reuse locations, most of which did extremely well this past year. The staff recommendation is to maintain all 10 locations and provide increases to those who significantly surpassed their yearly goal. In all, staff is recommending that $96,000 in federal funds be devoted to supporting the reuse centers.

This past year, MoAT supported 8 demonstration centers around the state. Cumulatively, the centers provided 644 demonstrations to individuals and families. Staff are recommending that $23,000 in federal funds be used to support the demonstration centers.

The Executive Board advanced to the Council a recommendation that the demo and reuse contracts for the upcoming federal fiscal year be approved as outlined and commit $119,000 of federal funds to 10 reuse and 8 demonstration centers. The membership (absent Aaron Luna who recused himself) voted in favor of the proposal (Motion: Second: )

### Approval of updated state ICT Standards

The Missouri Assistive Technology Council is tasked in its state statute with adopting information technology accessibility standards to be used by each state department or agency so employees, program participants and members of the general public can access and use information and data that is comparable to access by individuals without disabilities.

Earlier this year, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), a set of international standards to make web content more accessible for people with disabilities were updated to version 2.1.

While updating Missouri’s standards ensures the state remains in legal compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and also Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, the primary motivation for updating to WCAG 2.1 is to provide inclusive access to and improved user experience of information communication technologies.

The Executive Board advanced to the Council a recommendation to adopt the WCAG 2.1 guidelines for Missouri. The vote by the membership to adopt the revised standards for Missouri was unanimous.

## 7. Program Data and Updates

#### Demonstration and Reutilization

Scout shared a few examples of how the demonstration and reutilization centers positively impact individuals across the state. Highlighted were a woman who visited the demonstration site in Warrensburg and through comparing and contrasting devices learned that a walker was a more appropriate device for her mobility challenges than a cane. In another instance, an occupational therapist in Columbia discovered a special glove that provides better grip and is a perfect match for a post-stroke client. Scout highlighted an example from the LIFE Center in Farmington in which a 77-year old individual with mobility challenges due to gout-like symptoms received a power chair that met their needs and helped them be able to take care of their pets pain-free.

Related program data was included in the Council folder.

#### TAP for Telephone and Wireless

Stacy provided program updates on both the TAP for Telephone (TAP-T) and TAP Wireless (TAP-W) programs, which provide adapted phones for individuals with various types of disabilities. TAP-T typically supplies landline phones and basic adapted cell phones. Currently, the program is working to reinstate the BlindShell phone, which was pulled due to technical issues, and is also exploring a new device for users with quadriplegia or upper-body limitations.

She went on to highlight recent training sessions she conducted that focused on assisting individuals in supporting others to use the various Relay services available for individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind or have issues with speech. These hands-on events allowed participants to better teach users how to make calls, connect their devices properly, and equip users with essential skills for successful communication.

She finished by reminding members that TAP-W provides primarily smartphones with related apps and features to make them accessible to a wide variety of users.Stacy noted that program demand has been level but could grow as more communication technologies integrate with phones.

Program data was provided in the Council folder.

#### TAP for Internet/DeafBlind Equipment Program

Brenda offered a quick reminder that the TAP for Internet Program (TAP-I) provides eligible Missourians with free adaptive computer input and output devices for those who cannot use a standard computer. She outlined examples of devices available through TAP-I, including screen readers, screen magnification software, adapted keyboards, and speech-to-text software. Brenda also highlighted the program’s consumer support providers, who offer guidance on device selection and training to help users maximize accessibility. Notably, Missouri remains the only state to offer a program of this kind.

She went on to overview the iCanConnect program, funded by the FCC under the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010. iCanConnect provides individuals with both vision and hearing loss access to distance communication through devices like iPads, iPhones, and Braille note-takers. The program also provides training to individuals. Although the program serves a modest number of individuals (around 50 per year), it has a significant impact, promoting independence and connectivity. Eligibility for iCanConnect is based on an income cap set at 400% of the poverty level. She concluded by sharing a testimonial from a participant who, with no prior tech experience, now uses his devices for communication, health care, and personal growth.

Program data for both TAP-I and the DeafBlind Equipment Program was provided in the meeting folder.

#### ATR and ETC

Kara reminded members that the device loan program, ETC, offers free, short-term loans of assistive technology (AT) to individuals, schools, and agencies statewide. With over 2,000 devices in inventory, the program allows users to try various items, from simple switches to advanced refreshable braille devices. Borrowers, such as educators, healthcare providers and agencies can request multiple devices to help them assess what works best. A survey accompanies each loan to gather feedback, helping to gauge the program's impact and guide future needs. While loan numbers dropped slightly from the previous year, more individuals borrowed devices, with the most popular items being speech communication devices, iPads with various assistive apps, and vision aids.

#### Show-Me Loans / KAT / MFP

Eileen provided a synopsis of the Show Me Loans program, established in 2001. The program provides affordable financing for assistive technology (AT) to help individuals purchase items such as adapted vehicles, hearing aids, and home modifications. It offers loans with a stable interest rate between 2% and 4%, depending on income, with an even lower rate of 1% for AT loans used for employment. Accessible vehicle loans are especially beneficial, as they offer rates far below the general market, making these typically costly purchases more accessible for Missourians.

Additionally, since 2011, the program has reported borrowers' activities to credit bureaus, helping individuals to build their credit history and credit score. An example shared was of a borrower who began with no credit history and achieved a score of 670.

Despite rising general interest rates, the program has managed to maintain its low rates, continuing to operate with funds from a revolving loan system. The program has lent over $5 million to date and consistently meets its budgetary limits due to high demand, with recent adjustments to expand capacity.

In reference to the Kids Assistive Technology Program (KAT), she went on to share that the program is funded by the Bureau of Special Healthcare Needs and provides AT funding for children under 21 when other options have been exhausted. KAT covers a range of items, from recreational AT to adaptive vehicles and hearing aid copayments, supporting families with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty line.

She concluded with a short review of the Money Follows The Person (MFP) program. This partnership with the state's Show Me Homes Program helps individuals transition back to their homes or to new residences after being in long-term care. It primarily supports those at the poverty level. Recently, the program assisted a woman with bilateral leg amputations who uses a wheelchair to return to her longtime home. Since her front entrance was inaccessible, the program funded an aluminum rail and a transition ramp. MFP contributed over half of the $4,310 cost. This collaboration enabled her to safely rejoin her partner in their home of 20 years.

Additional program information can be found in the Council folder.

## 8. New Business

An overview of two current employment initiatives (Employment First and Missouri as a Model Employer) the DD Council is focusing on was provided by Stacy Morse. Noted were a pilot project underway to improve the accessibility of the MoCareers website ensuring it is usable by individuals with disabilities seeking employment. Also mentioned was the development of an interagency memorandum of understanding centered around the sharing of information about assistive technology, MoABLE accounts and other resources and services with consumers across the service delivery system.

Gary Wunder alerted the members to issues and concerns with the Services Support Program (SSP). Especially noteworthy was a concern that this valuable program will run out of funds. It was also noted that the current program administrator is not renewing their contract and a new administrator is yet to be selected. Advocates will be reaching out to elected officials in early 2025 to encourage their support for increasing program funding.

## 9. Announcements

Next Meeting - Virtual - December 6th

## 10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 12:10 PM (Motion: Arbeiter; Second: Rohr)