NMTAP logo, state with Zia symbol with four stick figures with disabilities

*Keith Maes*

*Chairperson*

**NEW MEXICO TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

Monday, March 15, 2021

Zoom Platform

**Members Present:** Keith Maes (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/DVR - Chair); Bill Newroe (Consumer of AT); Robin Garrison (Disability Rights New Mexico/DRNM); Ricardo Ortega (Consumer of AT); Chris Zafra (Department of Workforce Solutions/DWS); Albert Deimer (Independent Living Resource Center/ILRC); Nat Dean (Consumer of AT); German Benitez (New Mexico Commission for Blind/CFB); **Absent:** none

**NMTAP Staff**: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager); Maurice Alvarez (AT Specialist), Linnea Forsythe (Director of Governor’s Commission on Disability/GCD)

**NMTAP Partners present:** Anthony Montoya and Jordan Robinson (Adelante Development Center/ADC); **Absent:** San Juan Center for Independence representative

**Guests:** none

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Keith M, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:09 pm. Roll call of those present established that a quorum was present. He noted that the virtual method of providing services through the pandemic will continue with some changes now with schools returning to in-person learning.

Keith M asked for approval of the agenda. German B moved to approve with moving NMTAP financial report to next item; Ricardo O seconded, and all council members approved the agenda by a roll call vote.

**NMTAP financial report:** Linnea F noted that the budget for FY21 is $527,500, including AgrAbility funding that will be reduced due to changes in that project. The request for FY22 is for $539,200, with AgrAbility funding included, and this will be decided after the legislative session concludes. Again, there was an appropriation request, Senate Bill 47, that would provide funds for home modifications and assistive technology through the GCD. This bill is still in the Senate Finance Committee. There was discussion regarding the idea of a training foundation for licensed homebuilders to get accessibility certification though the GCD Residential Accessibility Modification Program. Bill N is interested in this and will connect with Linnea to follow up on some of his ideas. The initiative for increasing internet access especially for schools was noted and that NMTAP did offer tools to bridge that gap early in the pandemic especially through the Northern Satellite office spearheaded by Glenn Damian.

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. Robin G moved to approve the minutes with two minor clarifications, Bill N seconded, and all council members approved the minutes from December 14, 2020 by roll call vote.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A noted that NMTAP was surprised there was not a large increase in equipment requested by schools during the pandemic. She feels that some equipment is not appropriate or needed in the home setting plus teachers and students are focused on the basics of virtual connections. She also noted that devices were on loan for a longer time during the pandemic as well. Overall data is lower than usual during the pandemic including 44 demonstrations, 15 trainings and 41 public outreach events that were provided to date in this federal fiscal year. Nat D offered that council members are also providing outreach on AT in a variety of conferences. Our primary focus is the individual people we serve, and that data numbers are a secondary focus.

The annual Assistive Technology Conference (ATC21) will be held virtually via Zoom on September 13 – 16, 2021. The first day will be an “exhibitor day” in which providers or vendors of AT or AT services will be provided. A list of all presenters with contact information for reference to attendees will be included. The educational sessions are pretty much in place for the other days. The cost will be nominal using a virtual venue due to reduces expenses. Input from council members was welcomed and discussion on how to record the sessions to extend options for attendees to access all the educational sessions, especially related to Certified Educational Units (CEUs).

AgrAbility continues to offer services with a few more food producers served by Occupational Therapists now a part of the project. The open AT Specialist position should be advertised within the next few days. April 14, 2021 is National AT Awareness Day and it was discussed to note this on our Facebook and website. The NMTAP Facebook launched in January and as of today our page has 33 Likes, 43 followers and we have reached an estimated 449 individuals. It is growing slowly and connecting with those who follow us is a natural way to expand outreach. There was discussion regarding connections to other programs through Facebook. Information of our Adelante partner programs expanded services will be included in NMTAP program outreach as appropriate.

**FINANCIAL LOANS (NM SEED Loans and Access Loan NM) UPDATE:**

No representative was present. Tracy A did note that the reports were provided to all council members by email prior to the meeting and while there are several open loans with individuals, there have been no new loans provided since the beginning of this federal fiscal year (October 2020). Nat D inquired if the van with a wheelchair lift discussed in a past meeting was resold, since she is aware of many inquiries in the Santa Fe area to purchase one. Tracy A will make sure to follow up.

**REUSE (Back In Use and DiverseIT - Adelante) UPDATE:**

Jordan R reported that the DiverseIT program provides computers to individuals with disabilities, supported in part by NMTAP, as well as provides training in a variety of ways through support of other benefactors. Regarding computer requests, there are currently 89 cases open in various states of the process, including waiting for response back from the requestor, waiting for proof of disability or waiting for a satisfaction survey response. They currently do not have laptops available but do have desktops. They get donations almost weekly and provide at least one computer each day. They are providing curbside services with safe protocols in place. They also will update computer operating systems for computers obtained through the program. Training that they provide include 2 training programs: one is called Google IT (an entry level program usually completed within 8-12 months) and an A+ certification program (generally completed in 6 months) for people with disabilities at a cost. They also offer free public training every Wednesday at 3pm with 4 rotating courses such as a basic computer introduction, Software versus Hardware or Cyber safety. All trainings are currently virtual and information is available on the website at <https://goadelante.org/diverseit/>.

Smart phones are not included, nor are tablets due to providers no longer providing replacement parts.

Anthony M reported that from December through February Back in Use provided 420 pieces of medical equipment to 226 individuals through curbside services using safe protocols. Equipment donations are reduced, and they get about 10 recipient requests each day. Wheelchairs have also been loaned to the vaccine site at Expo New Mexico for access as needed. He shared a story of an individual they provided a hospital bed to that reduced her pain and improved her situation. There was discussion about donations that are not standard durable medical equipment and Back in Use will accept some items on a case by case basis, but with no in-person access for consumers it is harder to provide these. It was noted that the overall GiveABQ program also provides furniture for households and offices.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Robin G noted that DRNM has collaborated with Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to improve access in the legislative session in both the house and senate, working with separate teams. DRNM’s special education team anticipates increase in requests for help as schools’ transition back to in-person learning, including mask issues. They are also involved in re-writing instructions for absentee ballots for individuals with visual impairment and cognitive challenges. They are also part of a taskforce working on website accessibility with the Secretary of State office. That office has been wonderful to work with.

German B noted that CFB Technology for Children has provided 13 different note takers to students and they have been dropping equipment at vocational rehabilitation participants at their homes.

Bill N continued the discussion regarding home accessibility, noting that digital and physical accessibility often go hand in hand. It was noted that RAMP does lots of outreach in the rural areas and that there is an increase in our portable ramp loans in the last few years. This would include a temporary ramp after an individual’s rehabilitation situation. NMTAP often refers individuals to RAMP when a long-term situation is warranted. It was noted that there are issues with modifications through Medicaid insurances and the discussion of increasing expertise in knowledge of accessible modifications has room for improvement. Albert D added that he works with contractors despite travel restrictions. He noted challenges with projects not being completed within the budgets allowed and not including floor replacement or enhancement when doing accessible projects within the home.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

There was none.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

There were none.

**ADJOURN:**

While all council members miss in-person interactions it was agreed to hold the next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting on July 12, 2021 at 1pm via Zoom in alignment with current guidelines. The meeting was adjourned at 3:29pm as moved by Robin G and seconded by Bill N.

***Approved on 7.12.21***