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, October 18, 2021

Zoom Platform

**Members Present:** Keith Maes (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/DVR - Chair); Bill Newroe (Consumer of AT); Ricardo Ortega (Consumer of AT); Chris Zafra (Department of Workforce Solutions/DWS); Albert Deimer (Independent Living Resource Center/ILRC); Nat Dean (Consumer of AT); **Absent:** Robin Garrison (Disability Rights New Mexico/DRNM) excused, German Benitez (New Mexico Commission for Blind/CFB)

**NMTAP Staff**: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager); Maurice Alvarez (AT Specialist), Julie LaJeunesse (AT Specialist)

**NMTAP Partners present:** Anthony Montoya and Jordan Robinson (Adelante Development Center/ADC); Larry McCabe (San Juan Center for Independence), Jason Quimby and Patti West (Western New Mexico University/WNMU - NMTAP Satellite), Glenn Damian (Northeastern Regional Educational Cooperative (NEREC) **Absent:** none

**Guests:** Brian Shobel (Albuquerque Public Schools)

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Keith M, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:08 pm. Roll call of those present established that a quorum was present.

Keith M asked for approval of the agenda. Chris Z moved to approve the agenda; Bill N seconded, and all council members approved by a roll call vote.

Keith M asked for approval of the draft minutes. Bill N moved to approve the minutes as amended, Nat D seconded, and all council members approved the minutes by a roll call vote.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A noted that the federal fiscal year ended in September. She thanked all the partners for providing data and reminded them that narrative stories are needed for all service areas in the annual report. She provided a comparison of federal data reported since 2014 with preliminary data for 2021. She noted that numbers for device demonstrations and device loans reduced in 2020 early in the pandemic and are beginning to increase again. It was suggested that the number of device loans decreased due to everyone’s focus on basic needs at first and now it is increasing as we all learn how to re-engage in life during the ongoing pandemic. It was noted that the value of reused equipment given in 2021 was $227,699 value and is calculated by current retail prices per the federal government requirements. She added that there are different statistics required for the federal and state annual reports. For state reporting there are Key Performance Measures (KPM) that count the number of AT devices loaned statewide and the number of outreach events. The 2021 state fiscal year target for devices loaned was 580 and we loaned 352. The target for outreach events was 200 and we provided 307 according to the program director’s report to the legislature and governor.

Tracy A thanked the partners at WNMU and NEREC for their work and invited them to share more about their individual satellite offices. Jason Q from WNMU noted that they’re focused on outreach to schools and veterans. The university is a natural partner for outreach to area schools as he begins discussions to reinvigorate their involvement. Keith M offered to connect him to the DVR office in the area that is also working with the schools. The primary area veteran service center, the Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), is in Silver City and covers several counties. Jason Q is well connected to them which allows increased veteran outreach for utilizing NMTAP services. Discussions have also included a focus on mental health in their area as well. Glenn D from NEREC noted that most of their work is with the six area school districts. During COVID they moved to a virtual Chromebook platform and NEREC did lots of work setting up the accessibility tools on them and training in their use. This action contributed to the decrease in device loans and now that the schools are moving back to in-person there will be an increased need for iPads again. He noted that much of their current loan bank is out of date and do not support the need. Glenn D hopes to have an in-person training workshop for students in January 2022 for AT, employment, and employability that will focus on how AT and ergonomic workstations apply to employment. He noted that at times the information technology department in one school district will not allow iPads to be used or to connect to the internet which does not allow the usage of AT accommodations. There was discussion on communicating the need of AT for individuals with disabilities in schools, work, and community engagement. Glenn D noted that some schools have been open to his involvement in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings to communicate the AT assistance, realizing that this is more cost effective than an attorney getting involved. Keith M encouraged council members to communicate the need for AT in schools that is unique to the individual and may not be expensive. Brian S noted that Albuquerque Public Schools has a universal design team and using Google extensively. Many features are providing accommodations needed for students when turned on. This may not be checked as AT in the IEP, but the assistance to the student is being addressed.

Tracy A quickly finished the report with a few notes. ATC21 was a great success with 145 people involved and about 65 attendees in each session, which is about par for previous events. She noted that Facebook launched in January 2021 and that outreach has progressively increased in activity. All council members were encouraged to Like the page and share posts. The program will extend the device loan period to 6 weeks to allow for a better trial period. There will be some restructuring in the AgrAbility Project work since the UNM Professor partner moved out of state and a dairy expert from NMSU has joined the team.

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

Due to time constraints of some attendees, the ReUse project reported next.

Jordan R, manager of DiverseIT, noted that two new training cohorts have started the certification programs as they are now in the second year of this initiative. The Google IT certification is training for entry level IT customer support jobs and the A+ certification is recognized for refurbishing computer jobs. Majority of the previous certification graduates are currently employed in IT jobs in the community. They are also still looking for paid positions for persons with disabilities for the project called UI/UX testing program. This is through Source America in which individuals with traumatic brain injury or vision loss can be paid to trial new digital applications prior to being rolled out to the public. Please email [info@DiverseIT.org](mailto:info@DiverseIT.org) for further information about any of these opportunities.

These are services extending beyond the ReUse computer program supported by NMTAP. The number of computers provided were down a bit possibly due to the Chromebooks provided to students during COVID home schooling. They continue to provide outreach to other counties in the state including Otero, Socorro, and Valencia. They are donating 40 computers to Highland High School that are outdated for DiverseIT services and will speak to a new after school group at the school for computer refurbishing and coding. This can be a good bridge to the DiverseIT training and reach more students with disabilities.

Anthony M, manager of Back in Use, introduced Daniela S who is a great support. They noted that the number of equipment items they provided were down due to a decrease in viable device donations. He also noted that several individuals are denied shower chairs and other devices as insurance plans define them as luxury items. Many consumers find themselves on a waiting list for medical equipment due to COVID as well, so Back in Use is the only option in these situations. They continue with curbside services for safety and continue to follow COVID guidelines. As some activities are opening, they are increasing their outreach, including senior centers, with continued COVID safe practices. In these events, they talk about the program, take some equipment items, and adjust devices as needed. They are talking to Albertson’s to possibly do a donation drive for equipment since equipment is given out as fast as they are received and sanitized. They have also provided hand sanitizer to consumers as they have it available. Keith M reminded council members to encourage medical equipment donations to Back in Use.

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

Larry M reported on both financial loan programs. There is a total of $2,276,551.04 involved in the Access Loan program at the end of September 2021, with a loss in some of the investment funds. Fluctuating gains and losses of invested funds are to be expected over time. There are $1,457,343.60 currently held in open loans. In the quarter since July 2021, three new loans were given for accessible vehicles for a total of $97,665.27 and three loans were paid off for a total of $ 53,774.98. The money from the paid off loans are added back into the bank to be available for new loans to individuals with disabilities. Larry M added that modified vehicle availability is down and the last affordable one was purchased from Denver, Colorado. He noted that most of the Access Loans are for modified vehicles. For iPads with applications or smaller priced AT, SJCI utilizes a grant they have or their procurement funds. If an item costs less than $1000, the requirements to get a loan may be too much trouble. The Westsmith Foundation grant funds are for youth with or without a disability, up to the age of 25 years old from the Farmington area. The procurement funds are available statewide through both SJCI and Independent Living Resource Center in Albuquerque, require a person with a disability with a limited income, and could fund an item under $1000. Discussion ensued if there is a gap in obtaining funding for smaller AT items. Larry M noted that SJCI started the year with $94,000.00 procurement funds for seventy counties, so if home modification projects are requested, the money may not go very far.

There is a total of $641,162.74 involved in the SEED Loan program at the end of September 2021 with $35,801.99 available for new loans. There is one remaining open loan was $2,337 and there were no more loans provided.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Nat D noted that the service animal information on the GCD website continues to be outdated and requests this be addressed.

Bill N requested continued discussion around the AgrAbility Project. Keith noted there is Red Willow Farm in Taos that is operational all year round and may provide a connection to AgrAbility. Tracy A stated that the SEED Loan program is incorporated in the AgrAbility grant, but that there have been very few loans requested and no new loans provided since January of 2019. Discussion continued if DVR has many requests from farmers and ranchers for services and Keith M said that he had one with hearing loss in which the AT was provided to the farmer. Tracy A clarified that AgrAbility does not pay for items or services for any individual farmer. The grant project is to assess a wide base of needs and refer the individual to DVR, Access Loans, or other resources.

Chris Z noted that their workforce veteran services have lots of jobs available and few applicants. This is National Disability Employment Month, and their program is looking at creative ways to engage the employers and job seekers. They also provide them with information about NMTAP.

Albert D noted they continue to provide services with slower processes and higher costs due to COVID.

**NEW BUSINESS:** none

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Julie L shared a good resource for free custom mobility items, provided to youth throughout the country. Ramps or other adaptations that are made from cardboard but are sturdy. Information can be found at the website: [Made4me.org](https://made4me.org/)

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting will be on January 24, 2022, on Zoom unless it can be held in Las Vegas at the NEREC. The meeting was adjourned at 4pm.

***Approved 1.24.22***