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

*Robin Garrison – Chair*

*Ricardo Ortega – Vice Chair*

# **NEW MEXICO TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

# **ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

Monday, November 7, 2022

Zoom Platform

**Members Present:** Robin Garrison (Disability Rights New Mexico/DRNM); Ricardo Ortega (Consumer of AT); Brian Schobel (Consumer of AT); TJ Chester (Independent Living Resource Center/ILRC); Andrea Sterling (Consumer of AT); **Absent:** Bill Newroe (Consumer of AT); Julie Bisbee (Guardian Consumer of AT); Valerie Griego (NM Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/NMDVR); Dennis Campos (Department of Workforce Solutions/DWS)

**NMTAP Staff**: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager; Lisa McNiven (Deputy Director of Governor’s Commission on Disability/GCD)

**NMTAP Partners present:** Anthony Montoya, Mirian Martinez Rodriguez, and Jill Beets (Adelante Development Center/ADC); Leslie Wright, Damon Wright, and Charlie Phelps (San Juan Center for Independence), **Absent:** none

**Guests:** Nat Dean; Pilar Tirado Murray

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Robin G, Council Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:22 pm after resending new Zoom link to allow Closed Captioning. She apologized for the technical difficulties. It was established by roll call that a quorum was present. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Robin G asked for approval of the agenda. It was noted that the financial report will be given by Lisa M, a correction of a typo regarding Executive Committee, and it was requested to move the ReUse report from item 4 to item 2. Ricardo O moved to approve the agenda with these changes, Brian S seconded, and all council members approved by roll call vote.

Robin G asked for approval of the draft minutes from July 18, 2022. Andrea S moved to approve the minutes, Ricardo O seconded, and all council members approved by roll call vote.

Robin G reviewed meeting guidelines including muting your microphone unless speaking, identify yourself whenever you speak, wait until you are called on and to please turn your camera on if possible. She asked everyone to review the Open Meetings Act. Ricardo O noted that the captioning he utilizes does not work as well when not using a headset and asks that be used when possible. Robin G noted that due to her visual impairment, she may not always see hands that are raised. Tracy A will assist with that.

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

Anthony M, Back in Use, noted they provided 471 equipment items, including 69 computers, to 331 individuals in the last quarter. Donations are still currently down. He shared a story of an 82-year-old woman who needed a walker with all-terrain wheels. She had been denied by insurance and the program let her know they could not simply attach robust tires, but the very next day they received an official wheel modification kit and were able to safely make a modification. TJ Chester requested a breakdown of what equipment is being provided to the rural areas going forward. Anthony M said they recently found a way to deliver a power wheelchair to an individual in Socorro, but they do not have the budget or staff to serve all the rural areas.

Mirian R, DiverseIT, noted that they have a new program manager, Moriah Vigil, and two new associates. They have exceeded their goal to provide 15 computers a month, as noted in the quarterly report. Last month they had a single event in Santa Fe through the NM Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) providing 16 computers to individuals with disabilities. Five individuals were not able to attend that day and their laptops were left with case managers to deliver later. Jill B, who noted that this event served people from Tesuque, Espanola, Red River, and other small northern cities. She added that training on the computers, information on safely navigating the internet, and email were provided to each individual that day as well. They have desktops and laptops. Since laptops are most requested and there is not enough viable donations, they have been using grant funds to purchase more parts to make the donations they have functional. They are always in need of donations and welcome referrals from companies or state agencies. They continue to find ways to increase services to the rural areas and provide more training with their limited resources. TJ Chester asked if there was a waitlist. Jill B said only for laptops, and they appreciate the challenges with desktops for some individuals with disabilities regarding their living situations. It is about 20 days to wait for a laptop with the increased repairs they are doing. In the past the wait could be three months for a laptop, but no wait for a desktop. Tracy A noted that Brian S suggested Technology Integration Group (TIG) as a potential donor. Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) provide donated equipment to them. Tracy A noted that the chat is not accessible to those on the phone so raising your hand to speak is best if possible. Ricardo O suggested looking at startpage.com as a search engine for personal safety as they do not collect data or search history. Robin G thanked them by saying that one of her clients received assistance from DiverseIT and it was very helpful for them.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A reported that the federal report always requires personal stories about all services. This is due now and she will be asking for stories from all partners that are clear for lay person/congress members when reviewing the AT Act reauthorization and funding. She noted that just 100 people attended Assistive Technology Conference (ATC22), which is great for the first statewide in person training. All expenses are covered by attendance fees, and she noted that the cost of Continuing Educational Units (CEUs) and the hotel increased this year. Northeast Regional Educational Center (NEREC) is our fiscal agent for this event, and we are waiting on the final income/expense report. It was very successful with great feedback from everyone, and we will have ATC23 in September 2023.

There are far too many program activities to report, but Tracy A highlighted a few. She noted that NMTAP is refreshing the connection with the Veteran’s Administration Vocational Rehabilitation (VA/VR) services and the NMDVR. Training was provided to the APS Visual Impairment Team staff, resulting in two device loans. Training was also provided at the Cerebral Palsy Conference and at the NM Speech-Language Hearing Association (NMSHA), with lots of interest and questions at both events. Brian S invited us to the Bosque School event on Dyslexia, a public awareness event. We had some AT to show and there were about 50 interactions with parents and students. We are doing another awareness event at a Los Alamos Senior Center in a couple of days. Clearly, we are available for and provide outreach to individuals with disabilities of all ages in all areas of life. A successful Technical Assistance project we did was with the NM Museum of Natural History. They asked for hearing assistance for one of their volunteers and wanted to increase accessibility to patrons as well. We provide a demonstration of equipment, loaned the volunteer a device and the museum purchased one because of the successful trial. We also assisted with information and training on a system for their patrons with hearing challenges. She shared a successful story of a 12-year-old who was in a motor vehicle accident resulting in limited movement, spasticity, and speech impairment. This child received a couple of demonstrations of equipment, a device loan and is now working with a vendor to get funding through their health insurance for eye gaze technology for communication. She noted that device demonstrations are generally about five hours of staff time between preparation and adequate time for a person to try several devices. This is also a very person-centered experience; one device does not fit all.

Regarding the AgrAbility grant that NMTAP is involved with, the first 4-year grant ended in August 2022 and NTMAP is again a partner for another grant awarded to NM State University. Our role is much reduced for this new 4-year grant, providing four trainings a year and consulting on AT for food growers. We will also provide our usual services of device demonstrations and device loans. It is noteworthy that remaining funds from the first AgrAbility grant are being used to purchase new AT for the loan library. This is vital since new AT is always needed for the services we provide, and all staff are constantly researching new technology. NMTAP has done lots of public awareness events about the AgrAbility project and assisted in a National AgrAbility Project (NAP) Workshop held in September. At that workshop, held at Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), 70 persons attended including 31 farmers. One small farmer, who had attended a table we hosted at the Corrales Farmers Market and then attended the workshop, reached out to try some equipment. This farmer borrowed some long-handled gardening tools. All AT in our loan library is applicable and available to food growers statewide.

Lisa M, GCD Deputy Director, noted that information about funds drawn down from Federal Fiscal Years 2022 or 2023 grants are not available at this time. The scope of work for the additional $80,000 grant from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 is still in process. The plan is currently to hire a contractor as a Digital Divide Coordinator that will end in September of 2024. The council was thanked for their input on the use of this one-time grant over the last few meetings.

Overall funds from the federal government including these additional one-time funds and AgrAbility funds is about $493,000 for this year. We have also applied for a Christopher Reeve grant for additional AT equipment and will hear if it is awarded at the end of December. She noted that there is movement in hiring new staff for the GCD Residential Accessibility Modification Program (RAMP) and anticipate reopening in December or January. GCD has had five vacancies for quite some time and should have three of those filled within the next few weeks. She also reviewed several GCD activities including possible legislation for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) initiatives around accessible websites and enhancing Balloon Fiesta accessibility. It was noted that NMTAP and DRNM continue to work with the NM legislative council to make their website and services accessible. There was clarification that there are several RAMP programs in NM including with the independent living centers, Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), non-profits, state, and city programs and GCD.

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

Leslie W reported that there is a calculation mistake in the report provided to the council. She noted that the financial stocks have lost some funds, but not as many others. The report provided indicated that the total funds in the Access Loan program as of September 2022 was $3,287,130.77, but Leslie W stated that due to a loss of about $35,000 in one of the investment accounts and smaller amounts in others, the total funds as of September 2022 are $2,277,486. She is not including the amount that is readily available for new loans or funds held in Certificates of Deposit (CDs). She added that as of the end of October, the total funds are $2,244,891. It was requested that these discrepancies be clarified at the next meeting. Leslie W requested that the required reporting to NMTAP be later than the 5th of the month as it is hard to get bank statements by that time. NMTAP and SJCI will meet to update and clarify reporting requirements before the next meeting.

SJCI is not adhering to any cap on a loan amount and base it on an individual’s ability to repay the loan. Their website states that the maximum loan is $25,000 and the last policy manual states $30,000. Damon W noted that cost of vehicles is much higher now.

Leslie W said there have been three new loans this month and is unsure of the reason. There have also been no defaults on loans. She noted that she is now doing all the finances for SJCI and will be providing the reports. Damon W has several stories to share with NMTAP staff but did share one story about a grandparent using family members not living in the home to transfer a child in and out of their vehicle and used an Access Loan to obtain an accessible van and build a ramp into the home. He is also helping individuals get training on vehicle hand controls, working with the vendors and loan applicants.

Leslie W noted that Charlie Phelps is now the Director of SJCI, and she is now Chief Financial Officer and Chief Information Officer. She had previously held all those positions and while their research allowed for that, they now have separated those positions.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Robin G opened discussion of the updated Bylaws and Open Meetings Act. Andrea S, committee member noted that there were mostly typo changes, but the major change is to vote on the third member of the Executive Committee versus an appointment by the Chair. It was determined that one council member had to leave the meeting and there was no longer a quorum to vote. Robin G moved to table this vote, Andrea S seconded, and all council members agreed.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Robin G noted that DRNM has been working on voting sight accessibility, including accessible voting machines being used in private. She brought the new voting machine to ATC22, compliments of Santa Fe County, and about 30 people tried it. In the future, there may be an accessible voting machine housed at DRNM for small group trainings. The solid partnership with DRNM, NMTAP, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the legislative council with their IT department continues. Recite Me, an accessibility overlay, is now on the Legislative and Secretary of State websites. She is also working with the City of Santa Fe on accessibility.

TJ Chester noted that ILRC is doing mostly remote services with some in-person interviews. Social Security has a system of on-line appeals they assist with, a receipt is printed and mailed to the client. It must be signed and returned to Social Security. Many appeals or initial claims are not being followed up with when an advocate is involved.

Ricardo O noted that housing continues to be an issue for individuals with disabilities. Inquiries to housing units are not being returned. Demand is so much more than supply available for affordable housing and the rents are rising.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Nat D, using text to speech technology, noted that her service dog was not allowed to be with her in the hospital recently and not recognized as a medical device. There is also an issue with captioning support for individuals who do not recognize a post office box number as a residence, making it difficult to access for those under the protection of domestic violence. She is seeing an increase in multiple chemical sensitivities due to long-COVID issues.

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting will be on January 23, 2022, at 1pm. It is pending as a hybrid (in-person and zoom) meeting in Albuquerque. The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 pm.

***Approved 1.23.23***