

 *Keith Maes*

*Chairperson*

 **NEW MEXICO TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

 **ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

Monday, July 12, 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); TJ Chester (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), 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 (Western New Mexico University/WNMU - NMTAP Satellite) **Absent:** none

**Guests:** none

**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. He noted the transition we are in as we open the state and looks forward to possibly meeting in person again. He requested introductions from new individuals. Jason Quimby, WNMU Veteran’s Affairs Manager, who will be taking over the NMTAP Satellite program in Silver City, introduced himself. Julie LaJeunesse, new AT Specialist who started with NMTAP in June, introduced herself.

Keith M asked for approval of the agenda. Bill N moved to approve the agenda; Nat D 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, German B seconded, and all council members approved the minutes with TJ Chester abstaining from March 15, 2021, by a roll call vote.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A noted that in the state fiscal year 2021 (FY21), NMTAP services data did increase from the prior year, which is great since this full year was during the pandemic. During the stay-at-home orders most agencies and individuals continued to be in the mode of focusing on very basic needs rather than looking for AT to expand engagements. She noted the most frequently requested AT for loan is speech generating devices or software, and the second is portable temporary ramps. A few data points from FY21 were reviewed. During this time 62 individuals with disabilities benefited from device demonstrations virtually, which the whole process (evaluation of needs, preparation of a variety of AT devices, arranging the meeting and then time exploring the AT with the person) can take up to 5 hours. Less than prior to the pandemic, 170 individuals borrowed one or more AT devices for trial in their own environments and 28 trainings were provided statewide as well. She applauded the staff in adapting to providing services virtually, describing the efforts and the impact for consumers. She noted that our Facebook page launched in January and in this last quarter staff person Maurice A did 59 AT related posts that reached 9474 individuals in which 2256 of those engaged with the information. While we continue to see that “word of mouth” is still the most frequent way people hear about us, we anticipate Facebook will expand that outreach. Tracy A stated the 3rd year grant period for AgrAbility ends next month and the final year begins. It continues to slowly grow, with Dr. Wilhite increasing her work on the project as the lead on the site assessments. Finally, she reviewed that staff are in the office two days a week with consumers beginning to come in for services. We are following the state guidelines asking individuals who are not vaccinated to wear a mask and are happy to begin some in-person services. An additional task to be done as we begin to open is getting the van working after sitting untouched for over a year.

Linnea F noted that there is no change in the FY22 budget and that it includes $10,000 currently available to purchase AT to add to the device loan library as needed. She noted that NMTAP has done an incredible job, particularly in this last quarter regarding outreach, seeing that 8100 people were reached through specific virtual events. She described the legislature tracks key performance measures annually for GCD and two are for NMTAP specifically. One is the number of devices loaned and while the goal was not met, the number for FY21 is 352, up from 328 in FY20. The other measure required is the number of outreach events. In FY21, 307 events were recorded which is well above the goal for 200 and up from 80 in FY20. She congratulated the NMTAP team on a phenomenal job done during a full year under the pandemic and the council agreed.

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

Larry M reported on expenses for both financial loan programs. The cost for the SEED Loan program was $14,126.75 and for Access Loan program it was $5,595.42 for the last quarter. Details of the investments accounts were discussed, noting that there was a slight increase in both accounts resulting in a total of $219,937.64 in investments. There is $1,414,892.13 held in certificate of deposits to guarantee current open loans. Between the checking account and possible funds from the investment accounts, there is $438,842.29 available for possible new loans. A total amount of $1,853,734.42 overall funds is in the Access Loan program administered by SJCI. Larry M answered questions related to processes when individuals qualify for loans and how the program maintains money so that funds are available.

Larry M stated one new loan of $20,948.00 was provided in June for an accessible vehicle. Council members had a discussion regarding modifications done on used and/or new vehicles. United Access is the only vendor in New Mexico that modifies vehicles, which can create a backlog for service. Some manufacturers also offer financial assistance for accessibility features on new vehicles. This can be more effort on the buyer and SJCI is aware of some of the nationwide programs. Modifications can include lesser recognized options like GPS or backup camera as accessible features but are not traditionally recognized as AT, such as wheelchair ramp/lift and hand controls for mobility. Larry M is doing a presentation at the AT Conference ACT21 which will include some of this information and the council encourages further outreach around vehicle accessibility by SJCI, NMTAP and council members.

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

Anthony M, manager of Back In Use, noted that a very satisfied consumer agreed to share her story in an email describing the impact a motorized wheelchair from the Back in Use program had on her daughter’s life. He then noted that they are short-staffed and still have a part-time position open. He reviewed that they provided 200 items in this last quarter, including 37 computers. Pre-COVID they provided over 100 items monthly and they have been appropriately cautious given the population we serve. That is good yet may reflect a decrease in data numbers. Most consumers are highly satisfied and most get equipment for community living, but surprisingly a few stated it was related to their employment. They pick up donated equipment almost daily and some people offer to drop it off. The Back in Use program is still providing service by appointment only with curbside service.

Jordan R, manager of DiverseIT, noted that the reported 37 DiverseIT computers went directly to individuals with disabilities, and did not include repairs done to computers or those provided to non-profit groups. He shared that those activities provided 23 computers to members of the community, though they are not directly supported by NMTAP funding. DiverseIT still has some of the computers from the Intel donation earlier this year. The current request list is around 27 (fluctuating between 25-40 on average), down from the past when it was around 70-80 requests. The satisfaction continues to be high, and they reach out to those who are not as happy to see what would improve their experience.

One additional DiverseIT activity is IT certification trainings for individuals with disabilities and recently two students graduated. The Google IT and CompTIA A+ certifications are industry recognized certifications, which support entry-level computer customer or technical support jobs. This allows for employment in which a person could obtain extra on-the-job, specific IT training and get job promotions within a company. They also have a project called UI/UX testing program through Source America in which individuals with traumatic brain injury or vision loss can be paid to trial new applications prior to being rolled out to the public. They have also partnered with AARP to provide basic computer skill trainings to seniors for no cost. They will continue to provide services by appointment only since it allows for better preparation for good customer service and maintains health safety.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Nat D noted that she was happy to participate in a meeting to update the incorrect service animal information on the GCD website, reminding us that service animals are “soft AT”. The Patriot Act, federal legislation PAWS program may make $25,000 available for veterans to get service animals. She also noted that access to the judicial system is difficult for people with disabilities regarding closed captioning, assistive hearing device access, and other accommodations for those with cognitive challenges. Ramps and door openers in some facilities may also be an issue. She feels that the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) may not realize that the focus is on fully understanding proceedings, which may include multiple accommodation methods for each unique individual rather than simply offering one method.

Robin G noted that DRNM has been reviewing many sites for voting accessibility (over 30 sites in the last month) in which only 3 were accessible per ADA standards. In the process it was clear that most voting locations are in schools or court houses and the agency will continue to work on access for the general purpose of those buildings. She noted that some DRNM staff is back in the office as well. DRNM is invited to participate in the Secretary of State’s election school to talk about voting accessibility and Tracy A will be joining the expert panel discussing the importance and variety of ways accessible voting machines are important.

German B noted that CFB will reopen on July 26th with staff returning to the offices and accepting consumers again. The protocol requirements for that are to be determined.

Bill N stated that the SEED Loan program is such an asset to the AgrAbility project in general and specifically to the Navajo Nation food growers. Keith M noted that it would be quite useful to pay for tractor modifications, adding that he will talk to his Navajo Nation vocational rehabilitation program contact and encouraged other council members to also provide outreach for this possible assistance.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

All council members are encouraged to recruit new council members, especially those who are individuals with disabilities. We are looking for those with a variety of disabilities, who use a variety of AT and are from various areas of the state. Send anyone who may be a good candidate to Tracy A. Members are appointed by the GCD Director, Linnea F.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

There were none.

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting will be on October 18, 2021, at 1pm in Silver City, New Mexico (location TBD). The meeting was adjourned at 3:33pm.

***Approved on 10.18.21***