# **Assistive Technology Advisory Committee (ATAC)**

# **Meeting Minutes**

**April 12, 2023**

**Committee Members (present or joined remotely)**

* Larry Grable, Chair
* Brent Jolley
* April Shin
* Kathleen Barajas
* Gloria Cervantes (joined meeting around 2pm)

**DOR Staff (present or joined remotely)**

* Ana Acton, Deputy Director, Independent Living Community Access Division (ILCAD)
* Regina Cademarti, Acting Chief, Independent and Living Assistive Technology Section
* Elizabeth Wood, Independent Living and Assistive Technology Section
* Kritika Devi, ILCAD
* Ava Hacopian, VR Policy and Resources Division

**CFILC Staff (present or joined remotely)**

* Kathrine Crowley, Ability Tools Program Manager
* Brett Eisenburg, Executive Director
* Inae Mendoza, I&A Specialist

**Members of the Public**

* Jorge Ruiz, Central Coast Center for Independent Living (CCCIL)
* Lisa Hayes
* David Ifediba, California State Long Beach
* Marysol Rodriguez, CCCIL

**Agenda Item 1: Call to order**

Chair Grable called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. Grable welcomed all ATAC members to introduce themselves, followed by DOR staff, CFILC staff, and then members of the public.

**Agenda Item 2: Welcome and Introductions**

Elizabeth provided housekeeping items for the meeting attendees.

**Agenda Item 3: Review and approve meeting minutes from December 7, 2023**

Meeting did not have quorum, so Chair Grable opted to skip this section until more committee members could join.

**Agenda Item 4: Department of Rehabilitation Report**

Elizabeth discussed current happenings within the DOR. Informed members that Megan Sampson is currently on leave, with Regina Cademarti standing in as acting Chief. Provided details about the new Independent Living and Assistive Technology Section (ILATS) staff, including section manager Lisa O’Guinn, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) program analyst, Matthew Berube, Voice Options Program analyst, Karl Ortega, and the ILATS office technician, Susan Neeley. Applications for the Community Living Fund (CLF) were in the process of being reviewed. A brief update was also provided on the Independent Living Program’s success from FFY 21/22, with Independent Living Centers (ILCs) having provided 166,596 services to 26,750 individuals with disabilities and conducting 53,534 hours of community service.

ILCAD Deputy Director Ana Acton offered additional updates. The Governor’s revised budget, expected to be coming around May, shows general fund revenues will be $29.5 billion lower, leaving a budget gap of $22.5 billion for next fiscal year. The Governor’s budget reflects a balancing plan to help remedy this deficit. Deputy Director Acton highlighted that, as DOR is under the California Health and Human Services Agency with a 42% increase in budget over the last four years, there is no current plan to reduce DOR’s budget. DOR is working with stakeholders and other state departments on phasing out sub-minimum wage in California and employing an equity plan, strategically working to increase access to employment for individuals with behavioral health disabilities, particularly for those from communities of color. Deputy Director Acton noted that DOR launched the consumer payment card to facilitate the purchase of necessary supplies agreed upon with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor. Acton also discussed the Community Living Fund, a one-time $10 million investment from state general funds, designed to support institutional transition and diversion, including the purchase of Assistive Technology. There are currently 28 community providers covering 41 counties, with the goal of statewide coverage, and applications from community-based organizations are still being accepted. Deputy Director Acton discussed Home and Community Based Spending plan for the Traumatic Brain Injury Program, with 12 TBI sites currently across California, and AT is often purchased through these sites. Deputy Director Ana finished by highlighting the partnership with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the newly founded permanence of the Voice Options Program.

**Agenda Item 5: Voice Options Program Report**

Elizabeth Wood provided an overview of the Voice Options Program (VOP). This program is a collaboration with the California Public Utilities Commission and provides demonstrations and short-term loans of six speech-generating applications on iPads to Californians who cannot speak or who have difficulty speaking. Following this loan period, the Consumer can identify their preferred application, and enter into a long-term loan in which they receive their speech-application, a new iPad, a case, charger, and any ancillary devices needed to use the program.

The Voice Options Program has 29 Providers, offer materials in 11 different languages, provide in-person services to 98 percent of California, and also provide services virtually and by mail. Consumers range in age from 18 months old to over 80 years, span more than 50 disability types, and efforts are being made to reach more BIPOC and rural communities. Elizabeth also highlighted the VOP transitioning to “permanent” status, and discussed some of the proposed alterations to how the program is implemented, including the regional distribution of loans available to each program Provider.

Committee Member Brent Jolley, from CPUC, discussed the intention of bringing on Android (or other non-Apple) devices to increase the potential consumer base, requesting feedback from the committee for this proposal.

**Agenda Item 6: Ability Tools Report, Kathrine Crowley**

Ability Tools Program Manager (PM) Crowley reviewed information from the first quarter’s AT activities under the AT Act:

State leadership activities deal with the intangible information providing elements of AT Act requirements, including public awareness activities which have a wide scope and provide general information, information and assistance activities which have the narrowest of scopes providing information specific to individuals, needs trainings which are delivered to groups, and are designed to build on knowledge and skills, and finally, technical assistance, which are long term commitments to facilitate systemic changes to organizations that need improvements to be more inclusive to all members of the general population.

* Across the state, there have been 46 Public Awareness activities, reaching 2,034 individuals
* Ability Tools published six blog posts, on track to complete the goal of 24 this Federal fiscal year
* Information and Assistance (I&A) activities included serving 214 individuals through 146 activities using I&A line
* 37 individuals participated in three training workshops

State level activities are much more hands on. They're dealing with activities that work to get assisted technology directly into the hands of consumers. It includes device demonstrations which provide consumers with the ability to attune themselves to a device alongside an AT specialist who can provide information about the device and answer any questions the consumer might have. Consumers are also able to participate in device loans so that they can try out devices in their homes for 30 days. Consumers are also able to get devices for free or low cost through reutilization activities or get support purchasing new devices, utilizing State financing activities.

* 198 device demonstration activities were performed to 225 participants
* 397 devices were loaned through 270 loan activities. These included things like demonstrations of blood pressure monitors, Bluetooth switches, and accessibility features of iPads.
* 924 reutilization devices were distributed through 562 activities.

For Coordination, collaboration, and leveraged funding: Ability Tools worked with the DDAR and Voice Options Program to provide reporting and inventory training and one on one support. Ability Tools is facilitating ITAPS research to improve how demonstrations and short-term loans are performed in California. Ability Tools has also partnered with Bay Area Smarthomes to create a resource for smarthome bundles, which will be distributed to Device Lending and Demonstration Centers for community use, and trainings for use and installation will be provided to these centers. Crowley also mentioned the pilot program for accessible gaming and goals to implement this across California.

For notable challenges and next steps, PM Crowley noted that Independent Living Centers continue to under report AT activities in the National Assistive Technology Act Data System (NATADS) which impacts reporting to the Administration for Community Living, and noted they will continue to provide one on one support and additional trainings and assistance. CFILC reported four staff vacancies this quarter, including the Executive Director position (since filled by Brett Eisenburg).

**Agenda Item 7: AT Annual Progress Report**

Elizabeth provided an overview of the FFY 2022 Annual Progress Report (APR). The APR, using the NATADS data reporting system, includes data for State financing, device loans, demonstrations, and reutilizations, training and technical assistance, public awareness, information and referral, State improvement outcomes, and leveraged funding. A PowerPoint was shared to provide the following values:

* No loans were reported as financed through the Freedom Tech Loan Program
* Through State Financing activities, 497 consumers received 1,913 devices, saving consumers a total of $431,065
* No items were logged under the Device Exchange category
* Through Device Reutilization activities, 3,092 consumers received 5,838 reused/refurbished devices, providing total consumer savings of $4,310,042
* Device Lending activities provided 2,222 device loans to 1,282 consumers, with top categories being speech communication (1,152), computers (368), mobility/seating/positioning (181), daily living (177) and vision (98)
* Device Demonstrations activities, totaling 917 demonstrations, were provided to 1,023 consumers, with 96.58% of consumers noting they were satisfied or highly satisfied with their services. Demonstrations were provided to individuals with disabilities (875), family members/guardians (108), and representatives of education, health, community living, and technology (40)
* Trainings were provided to 641 individuals, with the most requested topics being Assistive Technology products/services (314), transition (174), information and communication technology (73), a combination of all topics (47), and Assistive Technology funding (31)
* Technical Assistance provided on topics of healthcare and rehabilitation (40%), community living (40%), and IT (20%)
* Information and Assistance was provided to 1,162 individuals, with audience members being family members, guardians, and authorized representatives (570) and individuals with disabilities (549)
* In FFY22, State Plan activities totaled $5,460,006 in leveraged funds. $99,794 in Device Loan activities, $3,738,280 in Device Reutilization activities, $10,616 in Public Awareness and I&A, and $1,611,316 in Device Demonstration activities
* Notable changes from FFY2021 to FFY2022:
  + State Financing – 3,269% increase in savings and 1,030% increase in consumers served
  + Device Reuse – 166% increase in saving and 86% increase in consumers served
  + Device Lending – 57% increase in consumers served
  + Device Demonstrations – 15% increase in demonstrations given and 3% increase in the number of consumers who were satisfied/high satisfied with their services
  + Trainings – 55% decrease in trainings
  + Information and Assistance – 12% increase in consumers receiving I&A

Member Jolley inquired how devices are procured for the DLDCs for demonstrations and loans, and Deputy Director Acton and PM Crowley was able to offer clarification: AT Act funding helps provide devices for short-term loans, as well as through reutilization items and the Disability Disaster Access Resource (DDAR) Program.

**REVISITED: Agenda Item 3: Review and approve meeting minutes from December 7, 2023**

At this time, committee member Gloria Cervantes was able to join, making meeting quorum, so Chair Grable returned to Agenda Item 3.

There were no questions, and meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.

**Agenda Item 8: AT Program RFA/RFP**

Elizabeth reviewed the current standing of the AT solicitation, as the current grant with CFILC is set to end in September 2023. Noted that based on stakeholder feedback and internal discussions, we were leaning towards soliciting a contract using an RFP.

Deputy Director Acton clarified that it should be a three-year solicitation with two one-year extensions, using last year’s AT Plan to drive the content. We have been working on this solicitation and the contract is projected to be executed by October 1, 2023.

**Agenda Item 9: Committee and respective community updates**

Chair Grable asked ATAC members to discuss AT updates, any information that should be shared, advice, community updates, etc. No ATAC members had items to share.

**Agenda Item 10: Public comment**

Chair Grable opened the floor for public comment. There was no public comment.

**Agenda Item 11: Proposed Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

Deputy Director Acton requested providing Bagley-Keene information, as the pre-COVID laws are anticipated to return July 1, 2023. Elizabeth proposed having the next ATAC meeting in June so this information could be shared prior to the reimplementation of Bagley-Keene.

Member Cervantes asked for clarification on what “public notice” means, and DD Acton answered that it involves having one’s location from which they are attending the meeting shared for members of the public to be able to join.

**Agenda Item 12: Call for motion to adjourn**

Chair Grable called for a motion to adjourn. Member Shin motioned to adjourn and Member Barajas seconded the motion. The meeting ended at 2:30PM.