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

# **DRAFT Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, June 29, 2023**

**Virtual and telephone participation options offered via Zoom**

**Attendance**

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

* Larry Grable, Chair
* April Shin
* Kathleen Barajas, Vice Chair
* NickoleRenee Mensch
* Keith Ellis
* Brent Jolley (joined 3:10pm)
* Kerry Chang (joined 3:15pm)

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

* Ana Acton, Deputy Director, Independent Living Community Access Division (ILCAD)
* Elizabeth Wood, Independent Living and Assistive Technology Section
* Kritika Devi, ILCAD

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

* Brett Eisenburg, Executive Director
* Kathrine Crowley, Ability Tools Program Manager

**Members of the Public**

* None identified

**Agenda Item 1: Call to order**

Chair Grable called the meeting to order at 3:01pm. Grable welcomed all ATAC members to introduce themselves, followed by DOR staff, CFILC staff, and then members of the public. A quorum was established.

**Agenda Item 2: Welcome and Introductions**

Elizabeth provided housekeeping items for the meeting attendees.

**Agenda Item 3: Review and approve meeting minutes from**

**April 12, 2023**

Elizabeth shared meeting minutes for attendees (distributed prior to meeting) and reviewed topics covered. Chair Grable opened floor for approval, voted for approval by NickoleRenee Mensch, seconded by April Shin. Roll call voting results:

Larry Grable – Yes

April Shin – Yes

NicoleRenee Mensch – Yes

Keith Ellis – Abstain

Kathleen Barajas – Yes

The approved meeting minutes will be posted on the ATAC webpage.

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

Deputy Director Acton provided general DOR updates. Informed members that the California State budget has been signed with no proposed reductions for the DOR. The budget contains authorizations for DOR to seek additional reallotment funds for vocational rehabilitation. Deputy Director Acton also noted the expansion of time for the utilization of Home and Community-based spending plan funding, from the American Rescue Plan Act dollars. The original end date for these expenditures was extended from March 31, 2024 to December 31, 2024. Acton shared that the $5 million allotted is being utilized to expand traumatic brain injury (TBI) services in California.

Deputy Director Acton provided an overview of the Community Living Fund, a one-time state general fund investment available through June 30, 2025 to expand institutional transition and diversion services in California. Noted that providers have increased from 2 to 30 since last ATAC meeting, with over $200,000 requested. Most dollars spent have been for supporting institutional transition and diversion, supporting assistive technology needs, and assisting with home modifications.

For staffing updates, Deputy Director Acton welcomed Victor Duron, DOR’s new Chief Deputy Director, who was confirmed by the Senate to his position on June 28, 2023. Additionally, Acton noted the recruitment efforts for the Community Living Fund (CLF) position, where they are in the process of reviewing applications. Regarding the Chief of Independent Living, Megan Sampson, Acton notes that she is still on leave, but Regina Cademarti has been standing in as acting Chief for the time being. DOR also posted a one (to two) year limited term position for the Chief of Independent Living to support division efforts.

Deputy Director Acton briefly reviewed the connection and overlap between Assistive Technology (AT) and the Independent Living Centers (ILCs), noting that the 28 ILCs receive additional funding for supporting AT (aside from AT Act funds). ILC grants were in process to be renewed, with the renewal including an additional $6 million in Social Security Reimbursement funds. These extra dollars will be used to support Independent Living and assistive technology services, and provide additional dollars to older individuals who are blind programs.

**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 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 and allowable authorizers for the VOP Authorization Form. Discussed goals for the permanent program, such as streamlining the access and coordination of services, prioritizing individuals with the most significant disabilities, and eliminating duplication of services and funding.

Elizabeth also noted the introduction of the California Public Utilities Commission’s (CPUC) Speech Generating Device (SGD) program, which would remain under CPUC but will utilize the network and resources established by the Voice Options Program. The SGD program provides additional funding for speech generating devices where the VOP may be inadequate or incompatible with the user.

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

CFILC Ability Tools Deputy Director Crowley reviewed information from the second 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 52 Public Awareness activities, reaching just under 30,000 individuals
* Ability Tools published five blog posts, on track to complete the goal of 24 this Federal fiscal year
* Information and Assistance (I&A) activities included serving approximately 350 individuals through 188 activities using I&A line and email
* 70 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.

* 263 device demonstration activities were performed to 291 participants
* 241 devices were loaned through 314 loan activities. These included things like demonstrations of blood pressure monitors, Bluetooth switches, and accessibility features of iPads.
* 181 reutilization devices were distributed through 682 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 facilitated 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, with Able Gamers, 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 previously, and noted the positions for Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Program Coordinator II have been filled.

Deputy Director Ana Acton inquired about CFILC’s use of additional American Rescue Plan act dollars. Deputy Director Crowley noted that there were a few applicants and they were holding interviews, but actively working to fill position.

**Agenda Item 7: AT Program Updates**

Elizabeth provided updates for the AT Program. DOR renewed the annual Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP) membership and finalized and submitted the California 2023 Assistive Technology State Plan for the June 1 deadline. Only minor changes made at this time for contact information, though noted that we are out of compliance regarding ATAC members, as the seat for the Dept. of Education Committee member has not yet been filled.

Deputy Director Acton reviewed history of the AT Program solicitation and agreements, noting that there are few competitors with CFILC for this program. Also noted that DOR is reevaluating how the AT Program is run and moving to improve it overall. At this time, DOR will be initiating an amendment to the current grant with CFILC.

Elizabeth added that this grant amendment should be to CFILC in the next month.

**Agenda Item 8: AT Advisory Committee Member Recruitment**

Elizabeth reviewed needed changes to Committee membership with the implementation of the 21st Century AT Act, which requires one or more additional representatives from the following:

* + - Dept of Health Care Services
    - Dept of Developmental Services
    - Dept of Aging
    - organization representing disabled veterans
    - a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service
    - Disability Rights California and/or
    - State Council on Developmental Disabilities

Recruitment efforts for the Department of Education are ongoing and the ATAC application is accessible from the DOR Assistive Technology webpage. Any changes to the ATAC Bylaws will shared with members prior to the next meeting.

Deputy Director Acton requested for ATAC members to review and provide feedback on application, as well as encourage members to share the application.

**Agenda Item 9: Bagley Keene Updates**

Elizabeth provided an overview of the Bagley-Keene laws to go into effect July 1, 2023. This covers various requirements of hosting public meetings accessible to Committee members and members of the public. Reviewed both available options for future meetings, and members opted for option 1, identified in California Government Code Section 11123.

**Agenda Item 10: 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 11: Public comment**

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

**Agenda Item 12: Proposed Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

Elizabeth proposed having the next ATAC meeting September 13, 2023, and noted that DOR’s Office of Legal Affairs and VR Policy and Resources Division was interested in presenting a proposal to amend the California Code of Regulations, section 7162, at this next meeting.

**Agenda Item 13: Call for motion to adjourn**

Chair Grable called for a motion to adjourn. Member Ellis motioned to adjourn and Member Jolley seconded the motion. The meeting ended at 4:09PM.