

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
November 16, 2023
Helena, Montana

Committee Members Present: Lisa Cannon, chair; Tina Shorten, vice chair; Cam Tulloch, Ron Bibler, Tom Thompson (via Zoom), John Pavao, Lee Hazelbaker, Bob Terwilliger (via Zoom), Michelle Owens (via Zoom)

Committee Members Absent: Sherri Odlin, Barb Varnum

MTAP Staff Present: Mary Taylor, Lisa Gault, Mike Bouchard, Jeff Haley

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Hannah Stokes, budget analyst; Sarah Seltzer, deputy administrator; Lori Sporrer, Hamilton Relay; Trisha Smith and Jamee Feuling, sign language interpreters; Shawn Tulloch, program manager for deaf services (via Zoom)

Meeting called to order:

Lisa Cannon called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Tina Shorten made a motion to approve the August meeting minutes and Michelle Owens seconded. All voted in favor and motion passed.

Public Comment: No public comment

MTAP Director's Report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor opened with the committee members up for renewal – Tom Thompson, Ron Bibler, Lee Hazelbaker and John Pavao whose terms expired July 1, 2022. She was told by the Governor's office that all four were reappointed in September. For the committee members whose term expired July 1, 2023, she was notified the day before the meeting that Lisa Cannon, Cam Tulloch, and Barbara Varnum have all been reappointed for another term. There will be two new members added, one is Ashlee Logan who will represent the deaf/hard of hearing disability community and the second member that is currently pending will represent the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

For the first four months of FY2024, MTAP has received 51 applications. This averages out to 13 new applications every month. Ms. Taylor noted this is a slight decrease compared to years past. In the past MTAP was receiving 17 to 19 new applications per month.

One of MTAP's goals was to continue to focus on the Relay Friendly Business (RFB) initiative. MTAP worked with the Montana Television Network to update the RFB commercial, recognizing and congratulating nine certified Relay Friendly businesses. Two RFB trainings were conducted this past year online on June 20, 2023, and October 25, 2023. For the RFB training on October 25, close to 30 people signed up and around 20 people attended. Certificates will be distributed to the participating businesses after they receive a test call from

Hamilton Relay to ensure that the business understands how a relay call works. Pictures will be taken with permission and posted on Facebook.

MTAP took part in an advertising campaign during the Bobcats and Grizzlies games to promote both the Relay Friendly Business training and the equipment distribution program. MTAP ads were featured on Great Falls stations during the games (KRTV and KTGF). MTAP will be participating in the Great Gift Giveaway through the Montana Television Network in December. This giveaway is a contest exclusive to the Helena area, where people answered questions about MTAP and were entered into a drawing to win a prize. A statewide newspaper campaign was carried out in the month of October to reach to the smaller towns and cities in Montana.

In reference to the Outreach Report, Ms. Taylor shared that Mike Bouchard attended the disability conference in Browning, and he also did a table at the Billings Mustangs baseball game. Lisa Gault and Ms. Taylor shared information about MTAP at the veterans' event at the Capitol rotunda in early November. Mike Bouchard will attend a broadband meeting in January.

The data on Facebook postings indicates that viewership fluctuates a little bit and the top performing paid advertisement was the Relay Friendly Business training post. Ms. Taylor mentioned that she used some of the Hamilton Relay outreach budget to boost this ad.

For the MTAP website, the bounce rate has stayed steady and during the month of October alone, the bounce rate went down, and the visits went up, meaning people were going into the website and doing things such as signing up for the Relay Friendly Business training. More resources have been added to the website such as the Do Not Call Registry and information about the ICanConnect program and a new feature with Sorenson and Zoom that gives Deaf callers to access an ASL interpreter via Zoom meetings. A request was made by the committee to ensure that MTAP's mission statement is on the website, and it's been added to the landing page and is also found in the "About Us" section.

Ms. Taylor added that she discovered some new information about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), that if one qualifies for a federal program such as SNAP, one can get free phone service. It's called Q Link Wireless, and she is not sure how long this will last as it is dependent on the federal government and the Federal Communications Commission funding the program. The ACP normally gives a discount on service so this is an additional program people can apply for.

The name change for MTAP was agreed on during the August strategic planning meeting to become Montana Accessible Communications and Ms. Taylor has checked with the legal department. The legal department advised her to follow up with the Secretary of State's office to confirm that the name is available. The office also advised her to get permission from the DPHHS director. Permission was granted to proceed. Ms. Taylor will not need to go to the legislature to get the agency name changed, it just needs to be changed in the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM). She has begun the process of getting the agency name updated in the ARM. .

NASRA had their annual business meeting virtually on October 5th. A new chair was elected who is Travis Dougherty of Maryland as well as a new secretary and member at large. A couple things were changed in the bylaws and the upcoming 2024 conference will be held in Louisville, Kentucky, no firm has been set, but the plan is to hold it in conjunction with the Deaf Festival there. There was discussion about allowing members of

the public and new vendors into the conference to increase attendance which lowers hotel costs and increases the revenue stream by charging fees to nonmembers who attend. There was a proposal to change the meeting to every other year because the board members are all volunteers, but this proposal was voted down.

NASRA hosted a webinar discussing the Universal Telecommunications Access Platform (UTAP). This new platform is a way to resolve a huge issue for Deaf individuals, and would allow them to have one phone number to use versus having several phone numbers, one for texting, one for relay, etc. The user would download the app and it would be cloud based and branded and it would be generated via the state to ensure that users are vetted and legitimate users. They are working with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that this can be done. The project is currently in the test phase being led by Maryland and California.

The staff participated in some trainings for iCanConnect, Administrative Rules training, Purchasing technician trainings, and disability etiquette training.

Budget Report: Hannah Stokes

Hannah Stokes opened with the state fiscal year 2024 budget totals for MTAP as of October 31, 2023.

Personal services	\$329,890
Operations	\$597,815
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,702,705</u></u>

Actual expenses through October 31, 2023

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (28.47% of the \$927,705)	\$242,471
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$21,292
Prior year expense	(\$217)
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$263,979</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through October 31, 2023

Personal services (28.59% of \$329,890 PS projected budget)	\$94,325
Operational expenses (24.78% of \$597,815 OP projected budget)	<u>\$148,146</u>
Total expenses (26.14% of \$927,705 total HB2 budget)	\$242,471

Revenue collected as of October 2023 - \$788,322

SFY 2024 actual expenses through October 31, 2023

Operating Expenses through October 31, 2023 - SFY 2024 \$148,146

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures \$11,375 (total relay budget \$207,000, remaining \$157,495)
- Outreach – total expenditures \$39,991 (total outreach budget \$180,000, remaining \$140,009)
- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$14,863 (total rent budget \$43,000, remaining \$28,137)
- Travel – total expenditures \$2,619 (total travel budget \$16,000 remaining \$13,381)
- Supplies – total expenditures \$1,151 (total supply budget \$5,815 remaining \$4,664)
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures \$21,864 (total equipment budget \$80,000, remaining \$58,136)
- Other Expenses/Equipment – total expenditures \$2,862 (total other expenses/equipment budget \$9,000, remaining \$6,138)
- Communications – total expenditures \$1,978 (total communication budget, \$6,000, remaining \$4,022)
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures \$2,212 (total repairs/maintenance budget \$11,000, remaining \$6,138)
- Other services – total expenditures \$11,103 (total other services budget \$40,000, remaining \$28,897)

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2024 indirect costs are \$21,292
- Projected costs for SYF 2024 indirect costs are \$85,000

FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time.

DPHHS Report – Sarah Seltzer

Sarah Seltzer reported that there are a few DPHHS updates such as the executive director, Erica Johnston, resigning and a nationwide recruitment search underway for her replacement. A new state medical officer has been hired, Dr. Douglas Harrington, and Chanda Hermanson has been meeting with him and working on addressing recruitment issues at the Montana State Hospital. They are working with him to ensure that vocational rehabilitation services are in place for the patients at that hospital.

During the recent legislative session, House Bill 922 was passed, and this requires DPHHS to develop and implement an Olmstead Plan. The Olmstead Plan is derived from 1999 when the U.S. Supreme Court made a decision and found that there was unjustified integration of people with disabilities and unlawful form of discrimination, so each state has to have a plan to address integration of people with disabilities in communities.

Lastly, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is recruiting for a Disability Advocate. If anyone is interested, contact Ms. Seltzer or Ms. Taylor.

Hamilton Relay Report: Lori Sporrer

Lori Sporrer reported that all calls answered within 10 seconds have been steady at 99 percent for traditional relay service and 100 percent for CapTel relay. For the traditional relay minutes, the average was 2,548 minutes for this year compared to last year at this time, which was 1,438 minutes. The CapTel minutes have had a 375-minute increase in comparison to this quarter last year at this time. The quality scores for traditional relay are 99 percent and the typing words per minute averages to 77.2 with a typing accuracy of 99 percent. For the CapTel relay, the average words per minute is 65.35, and the average rate of accuracy is 99 percent.

For customer care, anytime someone reaches out to them for assistance, via email, chat, or phone call, there was a total of ten contacts in the last three months (July, August, and September) for traditional relay. For CapTel, there were no customer care requests.

Remote conference captioning (RCC) minutes tend to spike during the months that MTAP has their committee meetings – example being July had 60 RCC minutes, August had 1,920 RCC minutes and September had 450 RCC minutes.

For outreach, Hamilton Relay has attended the Montana Speech and Hearing Association conference, the Relay Friendly Business webinar and currently, Emilie Banasiak is at the Montana Youth Transition Conference in Billings. For future outreach, there will be a webinar for 911 training.

MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Jeff Haley shared about his outreach event in September at the senior center in Saint Ignatius. About 42 people attended. In October he was busy with outreach, including a senior center event in Missoula with about 60 people attending and a health and wellness fair in Missoula that was held at the University of Montana. He also did the Montana Law Enforcement Academy training which he alternates with Mike Bouchard.

Mr. Haley discussed the use of a TTY after analog lines will be discontinued, since the TTY is analog based. Jeff demonstrated how to use the TTY with the acoustic coupler, versus using a standard phone jack. He explained that this will allow clients to continue to use TTY's even when all the analogue lines are obsolete.

Mike Bouchard shared that he did a table at the Billings Mustangs baseball game in September. He mentioned that there is a new manager in charge and Mr. Bouchard really appreciated the manager contacting him a few times prior to the game about advertising and when Mr. Bouchard arrived everything was set up for him. The new manager also followed up a few days later asking if everything went well. There was MTAP advertisements on the jumbotron and overhead announcements during the game.

Mr. Bouchard did a presentation in Livingston at the senior center as there is a new director there and visited the senior center in Bozeman. He also attended the Governor's Conference on Aging in Great Falls and the White Cane event in Billings. The event in Billings was set up by the Blind and Low Vision agency for Vision Awareness Month in October. Unfortunately, there were no attendees for this event. Another event that Mr. Bouchard attended was in Browning, Crossing the River Disability Awareness Day Conference, which was geared more towards businesses that might employ people with disabilities and he did a talk with the Blind and Low Vision folks. Another senior center he visited was in White Sulphur Springs and will possibly do an event there in the future. He went to Great Falls for the Montana Speech and Hearing Association conference and interacted with a lot of speech language pathologists and audiologists. He also attended the Montana Youth Transitions conference briefly with Emilie Banasiak.

Mr. Bouchard attended the virtual TEDPA Business Meeting recently, and the vice chair was elected to become the chair, a secretary was elected and bylaw changes. The same discussion ensued about the conference alternating years as in the NASRA portion of the conference. There was a vote done on allowing the vendors to stay for the conference similar to what took place in the NASRA portion of the conference.

Unfinished Business

Next strategic planning meeting - arrangements.

Strategic team meeting will be held on February 14, 2024, and the MTAP meeting will be the next day on February 15, 2024, same location for both meetings (Wilderness Room of the Colonial building in Helena).

New Business

May meeting location – Missoula at the Blackfoot Communications office and attending the Women 4 Wellness Fair in Pablo for the May outreach event, on May 22nd and 23rd, respectively.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m.