

 *Robin Garrison – Chair*

*Ricardo Ortega – Vice Chair*

 **NEW MEXICO TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

 **ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

Monday, October 16, 2023

625 Silver Ave SW, Suite 100 B, Albuquerque, NM, and Zoom Platform

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

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

**NMTAP Partners Present:** Anthony Montoya and Jill Beets (Adelante Development Center/ADC); Jason Quimby (Western New Mexico University/WNMU); Glenn Damian (Northeastern Regional Educational Cooperative/NEREC)

**Guests:** Sunny Gonzales (Department of Health)

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Robin G, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:07 pm. Meeting protocol was at the top of the agenda for council review. It was established by roll call that a quorum was present. It was a hybrid meeting with council members on Zoom and in person. Some of the meeting guidelines were reviewed.

Robin G asked for approval of the agenda. Andrea S moved to approve the agenda, Julie B seconded, and all council members approved by roll call vote.

Robin G asked for approval of the draft minutes from July 17, 2023. Brian S moved to approve the minutes, Ricardo O seconded, and all council members approved by roll call vote.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A reported the ATC23 conference held on September 11 and 12, 2023 was very successful. She thanked all the council members who volunteered and attended. About 140 people attended, the facility was very accessible, the exhibitors were well received and interactive with folks, and the educational sessions primarily resulted in a highly satisfied rating. The hands-on factor is appreciated as usual along with the on-line accessibility of training materials. The accessible voting machine was highlighted as a great benefit as a hands-on experience. Thirty-two of the attendees benefited from the Continuing Education Credits offered, with the majority requesting vocational rehabilitation credits and the second most requesting occupational therapy credits. Improvements or future sessions included more demonstration of tools, a presentation of the NMTAP services, wheelchair information, financial options, daily living tools, mobility tools, and more digital access. NMTAP takes these into account for next year’s plans. The facilities were great, and the exhibitors were satisfied, except for the smaller than standard tables. We will address this as well. Expenses for ATC22 were about $21,000 at the Sheraton hotel and the expenses at the new facility were about $9000.

Regarding AT equipment available at NMTAP, the GCD Commission recently authorized 72 items and 15 computers to be disposed appropriately. Thirty-eight were broken and will be discarded, twenty-eight are operable but no longer made, and three are operable and still made. Of those operable items, we will keep some for folks who have older AT and need a back up or replacement. The rest will be offered as donations to non-profits. Two of the computers were broken, but the others will be offered to DiverseIT. Tracy A shared that as many vendors of AT are more appreciative of the AT program’s purpose, they will loan equipment rather than only offer it for purchase. NMTAP staff always negotiate for this option and details of several vendors that have loaned us AT or applications were reviewed. The amount saved by not purchasing these items equals about $48,220. It was noted that many vendors offer free trials directly to consumers, and it was suggested that more focus be placed on training rather than having devices for loan. It was noted that the benefit to the consumer utilizing an NMTAP device demonstration of several devices at once to make a choice and then to borrow the chosen one is better than borrowing one at a time with a vendor looking to make a sale. The AT Act grant requirements were reviewed that device demonstrations and device loans are required to exceed training offered. The importance of training was acknowledged, especially for professionals to be aware of options.

Evidence of the importance of training, a Hands-On Workshops of Assistive Technology (HOW-AT) in person will be held on November 15, 2023, from 1-4pm at NEREC. It will provide training and hands-on experiences for learning disability and speech generation tools as requested. Glenn D added that he appreciates the expertise of the NMTAP AT Specialists with individual consumers in the northern area as well as the upcoming training. He noted that NEREC partners with New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) to serve six member schools and host an AT lab with some devices for loan through support from NMTAP. Council members discussed that AT is regularly denied in schools, an approach for Universal Design tools may be the best for schools to provide access, improvement in Individual Education Plans to fully review AT, and that individual advocacy with a care coordinator or insurance may allow for approval.

The position for the Digital Divide Coordinator using the one-time funding from ACL continues to be difficult to fill and recruitment continues. The NMTAP staff have several events planned in the next quarter and each staff member is helping an average of four or more consumers directly with device demonstrations or device loans. Each of these interactions average between 3-8 hours of staff time. Julie L will be benefiting from a course in AT Fundamentals through funding awarded from the National AgrAbility Project. This is a step toward AT Professional (ATP) certification. Tracy A, as State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of NMDVR Vice-Chair, will benefit from NMDVR paying for her to attend a national conference at the end of this month. This is noteworthy as she continues to encourage a more robust collaboration between NMDVR and NMTAP. It was noted that the SRC has requested this as well along with more emphasis on AT use and knowledge with their participants.

Lisa M, GCD Deputy Director, reviewed the services that GCD offers, their recent activities, and noted their new website location ([www.gcd.nm.gov](http://www.gcd.nm.gov)). The NMTAP website will soon be transferred to a new location as requested by the state IT department. Regarding NMTAP program funding, Lisa M noted that the federal funding request for AT is still pending with Senator Heinrich’s discretionary funds for $159,289.41.

**FINANCIAL LOAN (FundAbility NM) UPDATE:**

Lisa M reported that the audit of the financial loan funds is out for bids and will be completed as soon as possible to review the funds available for Adelante to restart the program. GCD Residential Accessibility Modification Program will pay for this audit. Council members requested clarification on the scope of the audit and Lisa M noted that it would be for FY23 (July 2022 to June 2023). Lisa M stated she would check with Stan R regarding the prior years in which the council members have noted discrepancies. The audits for San Juan Center for Independence (SJCI) received earlier this year for their whole agency, confirmed the questions the council members have about funds in the NMTAP financial loan program. Robin G clarified that the advisory council is not requesting an audit of the information SCJI has provided or audits that have already been done. The concern is to provide an audit of what has happened with the financial loan program in a review of transactions in the prior three years before FY23 that have not been clear in SJCI reporting. NMTAP council members feel responsible to ensure that the community funds for persons with disabilities have been managed properly. All federal funds provided for the financial loan program are to be maintained within the program only, including any investment funds, funds that are held to guarantee loans, and funds that flow in and out within the program. There is also a concern that money for loans has been held up for individuals with disabilities for at least 8 months who are unable to obtain the AT needed in their lives. Lisa M stated that she will take these concerns back to Stan R and that GCD is working to address the issue with what may be revealed with a review of last year’s records. Robin G has been in email contact with Stan R, and looks forward to the response regarding the concerns clarified today. Robin G feels that transfer to Adelante will go very well, and is appreciative of the effort to transition the funds.

Stephanie D, the FundAbility NM Program Manager, was unable to be here so Jill B provided updates regarding the re-opening of the financial loan program. They are working on Policy and Procedures, gathering persons with disabilities and financial backgrounds to serve on the loan review committee, and they have a new bank in place. They do not anticipate that an audit with hold up new loans being provided, however several Certificates of Deposit (CDs) are still tied to SJCI, and those funds may not transfer over for many years as they mature. A logo for FundAbiliy NM has been developed, they will create a stand-alone website (connected to both ADC and NMTAP) and are poised for a statewide marketing campaign.

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

Jill B, noted that DiverseIT gave out sixty-eight computers this quarter, which is about twenty a month. Please refer agencies to donate to DiverseIT laptops and they have many desktop computers on hand. The waiting list for laptops is reduced now to 17 people, but donations are a constant need. She noted that recently two sisters both received laptops to do telehealth along with everyday needs, and they are a good support to each other. It was noted that NMDVR will be updating their equipment soon and Jill B will follow up with them for donations. She also noted that both ReUse programs do not receive enough funding to fully sustain and DiversIT will be expanding their computer repair component to bring in some money.

Jill B noted that ADC has a new initiative regarding AT that will also bring money into Back in Use. They received a grant to purchase equipment to rent for persons with disabilities who are visiting New Mexico. This program is called Destination Accessibility, so look for this in the news soon. The council members asked about the possibility of also renting accessible vans to NM visitors. This idea has been discussed within ADC, but there are many challenging variables regarding safety and training, so this is not a plan at this time. Anthony M noted that they have 3 new wheelchairs and 6 scooters that are easily broken down to put in a vehicle easily for the Destination Accessibility and they are hoping to partner with Go Unlimited for future recreational access possibilities. Inventory items are given out as fast as they are donated and cleaned. Back In Use provided 451 items to individuals with disabilities this quarter and will be unaffected by this new project.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

None.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

None.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

None.

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting will be on January 22, 2023, from 1pm – 3pm. It will be a hybrid (in-person and zoom) meeting, location not confirmed. Robin G thanked everyone, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

***Approved by the Council on 1/22/24.***