

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
November 17, 2022
Helena, Montana

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

Committee Members Absent: John Pavao, Sherri Odlin

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

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Shannon Mackey, budget analyst; Asia Johnson and Emilie Banasiak (via Zoom), Hamilton Relay; Stella Woodrum and Trisha Smith, sign language interpreters, Anna Gibbs, program operation and support bureau chief

Meeting called to order:

Barbara Varnum called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Tina Shorten moved to approve the minutes of the August 18th, 2022, meeting and Ron Bibler seconded. All in favor.

Public Comment: No public comment

MTAP Director's report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor began with mentioning that she's still waiting on confirmation from the Governor's office on reappointment of committee members who have applied and there are a few applications for the vacant committee seat. She will continue to reach out to the Governor's office to follow up.

There have been 55 new applications for the first four months of the new fiscal year (beginning in July), which is a slight decrease compared to the average. She feels the slight decrease in applications is related to the television advertising being more focused on the relay-friendly business training versus the equipment distribution program. Ms. Taylor added that there are two different Relay Friendly Business commercials that have been made in addition to a new commercial focused on equipment distribution that will air. Radio advertising is also being utilized in Helena for the Relay Friendly Business and an email campaign in connection with ABC Fox will reach out to businesses in the state to encourage them to become relay friendly.

Hamilton Relay has been coordinating with MTAP on the Relay Friendly Business training. A training was held in February, the end of October and the third one is coming up the end of November. The businesses that participate and complete the training get a test call from Emilie Banasiak and a certificate of completion as well as having their business name added to the website and on Facebook.

This past quarter, MTAP staff have been busy sharing information at various events, such as the Governor's Conference on Aging, the Speech Language Hearing association conference, the Youth Transitions Conference, and veterans' events. Visits were also made to senior centers and some hospitals to hand out brochures and applications.

Ms. Taylor let the committee know that the cancellation policy has been updated for remote conference captioning (RCC). Under the new policy cancellation must occur ten days prior for Spanish captioned relay, one full business day for meetings scheduled to last 1-3 hours and five business days for meetings scheduled to last four or more hours or meetings that have multi-sessions.

In reference to the Facebook report, Ms. Taylor pointed out that the MTAP Facebook page has done well. The top-performing Facebook post this last quarter was information shared about employment that was available in the Disability Employment and Transitions Division. The top-performing advertisement was information shared about the American Sign Language class that is taught by an MTAP staff member.

The MTAP website had many more visits during this past quarter. There were 2,550 visitors through the end of June (previous quarter) and 3,699 visitors for this quarter ending Sept. 30th. Ms. Taylor thinks it correlates to the relay friendly business training as people go to the website to sign up for that training.

The two-year amendment to the contract with Hamilton Relay expires on February 27, 2023, and Ms. Taylor will be working with Hamilton Relay to renew the contract, pending approval from the MTAP Committee. The original contract was executed in 2016 with an option to be renewed for a total of ten years.

The FCC requires states to apply for renewal of Telecommunication Relay Services every five years. The FCC released a notice on September 26th requesting that states apply for renewal. The paperwork has been submitted for MTAP. Ms. Taylor thanked Hamilton Relay for all their help with the paperwork. Ms. Taylor is waiting to hear whether the program is recertified.

Changes to the MTAP Administrative Rules are still in process. Ms. Taylor has been working with the legal office to go through what changes are requested. All the form letters and Conditions of Acceptance documents have been updated. There will be two different conditions of acceptance forms used, one for the iOS devices and one for the regular phones. Ms. Varnum asked Ms. Taylor to forward copies of the revised Conditions of Acceptance forms to the committee.

The state government has been working on a state-wide assessment, called ROWS, (Remote and Office Work Study) and evaluating employee positions to see what positions are suitable for working remotely. In late October an email was sent out to each employee whose position would qualify. MTAP got a few letters and employees who are eligible may choose to work one or two days from home, depending on the position. If employees opt to do this, they must complete paperwork and do some training.

Discussion ensued about where to have the May meeting with suggestions made from different committee members. Ms. Varnum suggested a vote on meeting in Glendive and the majority voted for going to Glendive in May 2023.

Budget Report: Shannon Mackey

Shannon Mackey opened with the state fiscal year 2022 budget totals for MTAP as of October 31, 2022.

Personal services	\$254,621
Operations	\$627,867
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,657,488</u></u>

Actual expenses through October 31, 2022

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (22.70% of the \$882,488)	\$200,323
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$20,319
Prior year expense	(\$2,192)
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$218,450</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through October 31, 2022

Personal services (29.18% of \$264,000 PS projected budget)	\$77,044
Operational expenses (19.93% of \$618,488 OE projected budget)	<u>\$123,279</u>
Total expenses (90.78% of \$879,831 total HB2 budget)	\$200,323

Revenue collected as of October 31, 2022, \$777,973

SFY 2023 actual expenses through October 31, 2022

Operating Expenses through October 31, 2022 - SFY 2023 \$123,279

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures \$39,581 (total relay budget \$243,398, remaining \$203,817)
- Outreach – total expenditures \$40,910 (total outreach budget \$155,000, remaining \$114,090)
- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$14,286 (total rent budget \$42,500, remaining \$28,214)
- Travel – total expenditures \$2,564 (total travel budget \$15,000, remaining \$12,436)
- Supplies – total expenditures \$486 (total supply budget \$6,367, remaining \$5,881)
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures \$9,554 (total equipment budget \$95,223, remaining \$85,669)
- Other Expenses/equipment – total expenditures \$2,559 (total equipment budget \$10,000, remaining \$7,441)
- Communications – total expenditures \$1,528 (total communication budget, \$6,000, remaining \$4,472)
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures \$1,798 (total repairs/maintenance budget \$10,000, remaining \$8,202)
- Other services – total expenditures \$10,014 (total other services budget \$35,000, remaining \$24,986)

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2023 indirect costs are \$20,319
- Projected costs for SYF 2023 indirect costs are \$85,000

FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time

Hamilton Relay Report: Asia Johnson and Emilie Banasiak

Asia Johnson started with the report for the traditional relay and captioned phone calls. For the traditional relay, the FCC requirement for answer performance is 85 percent of all calls should be answered in ten seconds or less. The Montana TRS answer performance has been consistently between 95 and 100. For the captioned phone calls, the requirement is 85 percent of all calls to be answered in ten seconds or less. The Montana CapTel percentage has been consistently near 100 percent.

Call volume is made up of session and conversation minutes. The session minutes include any call set up that make take place once the customer calls in to relay and shares information with a relay operator before the call is connected to the person they wish to contact, and the conversation minutes is the time that the relay user is speaking to another party. The call volume for CapTel and traditional relay users has been declining. Part of this decline is due to transitioning from analog to digital and switching to internet-based phones. Another contributor is more virtual meetings using remote conference captioning and users using apps on their phones to transcribe. The FCC and the federal government are aware of this transition to digital and are beginning to allocate billions of dollars for broadband initiatives to get more broadband access and high-speed internet access to individuals who are not served or underserved such as those who are in rural areas or unable to afford high-speed internet. There is now a broadband office in every state and it's their responsibility to work on allocation of those funds.

The quality scores for traditional relay have been 97 percent on average and the communication assistants are typing 78 words per minute on average with a typing accuracy of 99 percent. For the traditional relay customer care contacts, the majority has been wrong numbers, hang-ups, and some questions for outreach. The CapTel customer care contacts tend to be less in interaction as they have a button on their phone to contact a customer care representative.

Usage of relay conference captioning (RCC) has been varied, some months have shown more minutes than others, no real pattern to usage.

Emilie Banasiak reported on past outreach and what will be coming up. She discussed the relay friendly business webinars that have been done this quarter with 48 people signing up for one but only 25 were in attendance. An issue that came up was that some state employees have a firewall on their computer which blocked the Go-To-Webinar software that was used for the webinar. Thirty-two people have signed up for the upcoming webinar later in November and Ms. Banasiak hopes to see more sign up. There has been interest in follow-up training and requests for brochures. There will be one more event for the contract year and that is the 911 training seminar in January 2023.

Ms. Banasiak mentioned that the scholarship program is open currently to high school seniors who have hearing loss or a speech difficulty and is attending either trade school or higher education. She encouraged the committee to spread the word to interested applicants who might benefit from this scholarship.

MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Jeff Haley reported on some of the outreach he has done such as the Governor's Conference on Aging in Butte and a table at the Thompson Falls Senior Center and he plans on visiting other senior centers in the coming months. He also attended a Veterans Resource Fair at the Capitol and met the Governor there.

Mike Bouchard attended the Montana Youth Transition Conference in Great Falls the previous month and he added that MonTECH was there, and they had a room showcasing all the equipment they loan out to people. He said that the person for MonTECH in Billings has left but he was told that they will be hiring a replacement for the Billings MonTECH office. He also has done outreach at the Circle Senior Center.

Mr. Bouchard discussed two models of phones called the Clarity XLC8 and the Panasonic TGM430. Occasionally there will be a client who cannot get a landline, whether it's cost, or no service. With these two models, they are Bluetooth capable. If the client has cell service, they can connect the cell phone to these two models and use it like a regular landline. The cell service needs to be good in that particular area and voice mail cannot be used on the phones as it reverts back to your cell phone answering machine. These two models give the MTAP staff more options to assist clients. Extra education is sometimes needed to train the clients to pair up the cell phone to the Clarity or the Panasonic phone and the benefit is that these two models give more amplification.

Discussion ensued about purchasing hearing aids over the counter per a FDA approval without consulting an audiologist.

Unfinished business

Strategic planning meeting will be set for February, the day prior to the regular committee meeting and a facilitator will be brought in.

Deaf World training – Emilie Banasiak and Asia Johnson said they have put together a survey that they can send to everyone related to how much understanding the committee members have about deaf culture, language and length of time people wish the training to be. The date for this training will most likely be in August 2023.

New business

May meeting location - Glendive

The meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.