

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
May 18, 2016
Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities Office

Committee Members Present: Linda Kirkland, Char Harasymczuk, Ron Bibler, Cheryl Dickens, Tina Shorten, Drew Arnot, Julia Saylor, Chris Caniglia, Marilyn Daumiller, Pat Ingalls

Committee Members Absent: Jim Marks, Tyler Pert

MTAP Staff Present: Barbara Varnum, Steve Johnson, Julianna Whittaker

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Emilie Banasiak, Hamilton Outreach; Lisa Furr, Hamilton Account Executive, Karie Whitlock, DET Fiscal; Trisha Smith and Stella Woodrum, Sign Language Interpreters, Lisa Gault, MTAP temp assistant, Shawn Tulloch

Meeting called to order:

Ms. Kirkland called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes from the November 19, 2015 meeting was approved as written.

Public comments: Les Clark from Montana Independent Living Project, and Chris Holmes from the Myrna Loy Theatre, requested financial assistance from MTAP for closed captioning eye glasses for individuals who attend Myrna Loy movies. Both described the proposed program, and the committee asked clarifying questions. The committee was concerned that donating money to the Myrna Loy would set a precedence for other programs to follow suit.

New Business:

Barbara Varnum mentioned the reason for the February 2016 meeting cancellation was because of her partner of 18 years has terminal cancer so she's been commuting back and forth between Helena and Kalispell to be with him.

Mention was also made of Peggy Williams' retirement and doing something to honor her being a member of the committee for 25 years at the August meeting and making available contact information to those committee members who might want to contact Peggy on their own time.

Several members have terms expiring in July such as Jim Marks and Ron Bibler who want to continue, Linda Kirkland, Chris Caniglia and Cheryl Dickins will not reapply to be on the committee.

MTAP Director's report: Barbara Varnum

Ms. Varnum reported that the new electronic case management is on schedule for being implemented at the MTAP office and the staff will have four days of onsite training, 3 days of testing and 3 days of deployment and is to go "live" at the end of June. Old files will be manually scanned in as the current database is not accurate regarding equipment loaned out and returned. Ms. Kirkland queried on what the process is for making sure there is proper records retentions and Ms. Varnum said that records are required to be kept for five years on equipment that has been distributed and tracked.

MTAP will request \$775,000 per year for contingency funding for the possible FCC mandate for the 2017 Legislature. This contingency funding is in the event that the FCC requires states to start funding the IPST, Internet Protocol Captioned phones for the states. The request will go to the director's office then to the Governor's office then on to the legislature. MTAP has submitted no other requests.

MTAP has had surplus dollars at the end of each fiscal year for the last two years. MTAP has spent about \$200,000 on advertising for SFY14 and SFY15 and approximately \$70,000 per year on clients. Focus is more on spending dollars on direct client services rather than media. In SF16, the media budget was cut from \$200,000 to \$140,000 and in SFY17, the media budget will be reduced to approximately \$100,000-\$120,000. Since we are saving money, there's a desire to open an office in Missoula and Julianna Whittaker would relocate to that office. Having an office there would enable MTAP to provide timelier services and reduce the amount of travel and overnights that Ms. Whittaker currently incurs. The Missoula office rent for the year is \$8,322 for an office/storage space. Current travel costs for Julianna YTD is \$5000. The forecast is that lodging and per diem cost will be cut 80% with opening the new office. A vast majority of clients are in western Montana so this would be beneficial. Ms. Whitaker has seven out of the top ten counties population-wide.

Mobile devices are continuing to be distributed as in calendar year 2015, MTAP has spent \$18,835. In calendar year 2016 (to date) MTAP has spent \$15,319. iPads and iPhones are distributed to those who are deaf or have a speech disability. Jitterbugs are distributed to those who are hard of hearing. Ms. Varnum has not had the time to follow up on the possibility of a voucher program as of yet.

Outreach – Susan Sperry no longer works for MTAP and the job position description has been revised and currently is being reviewed by DPHHS Human Resources. The position will still have outreach duties but not as high of a percentage as when Susan was employed. Most of the outreach Ms. Sperry conducted was working with media providers and this will be reduced. Since money has been reduced on media, an increase is being done in doing face-to-face outreach across the state. Referrals seem to increase if people actually understand the program and see the equipment that is used for distribution.

RFP/IFB – Hamilton Relay was awarded the RFP for TRS/CTS and the contract was signed on January 26, 2016. Thanks go to Ron Bibler and Drew Arnot for their part in this endeavor. The IFB (information for bid) for specialized phones and mobile devices was released on April 13 and closed on May 5th. This IFB was divided in two sections: 1) specialized telephones and 2) mobile devices. The bidders could bid on one or both sections. Teltex came in with the lowest bid (and the only bid on mobile devices) and was awarded both sections. The contract should be signed within the next two weeks. Thanks go to Cheryl Dickens, Char Harasymczuk and Julia Saylor for reviewing the IFB before sending it out for bids.

Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) – Ms. Varnum has submitted the rule change to update the federal poverty level index for 2016 in February. It has not been published yet.

TEDPA& NASRA – Conference is scheduled for September 7 to 14, 2016. Steve Johnson and possibly Julianna Whittaker would like to attend TEDPA and Barbara would like to attend NASRA and possibly TEDPA.

Operating procedures: Full committee

Discussion briefly ensued on the operating procedures and Ms. Kirkland suggested having a motion to accept the operating procedures as is, the only revision would be to change the date to be concurrent with this date and this year to reflect the 2016 time frame. Ms. Caniglia motioned and Ms. Harasymczuk seconded and Ms. Kirkland called for a vote. No opposition so motion passed.

FCC Meeting: Ron Bibler

Mr. Bibler reported that there is ongoing discussion about proposing changes and coming up with quality standards for captioned telephones so that other providers who provide services have quality standards to be evaluated against because there doesn't seem to be any at present time. At present, the FCC is checking to see if the rules for TRS, our relationship with the TTY apply to the Internet side of it. Mr. Bibler thinks it's inevitable that the IPCTS will be assigned to the states as there's growth occurring and funding as well.

Budget Report: Karie Whitlock

Ms. Whitlock reported that spending has been in the amount of \$714,060 as of April 30th. 72.4% of the house bill authority has been spent. Indirect costs (non-budgeted) of \$54,882 has been spent and a prior year

adjustment that affects this adds up to \$71,460 spent. 77% of the personal services budget has been spent, 70.5% of the operating budget has been spent for a total of \$659,833 for the House Bill 2 authority. For the rest of the fiscal year, about six weeks, the projected amount for personal services will be \$238,093 and that will give us a surplus of \$69,025. This surplus is due to Susan Sperry leaving her position in February. For the Sockeye project, we've made a milestone one payment of \$81,502 and the annual license fee of \$2,612.65 and expectation is that by the end of the FY (June 30th, 2016), there will be more costs associated with this project. Ms. Whitlock anticipates about 95 percent completion of the project by June 30th. Estimation is about \$50,000 more on the project.

The outreach program budget has been set at \$140,000 and projection is that it will come in at that amount or just slightly below.

The contract with Hamilton Relay runs from February 28, 2016 to February 27, 2019 with the ability to do seven more one-year contract renewals not to exceed ten years. This change affects the cost per minute from 1.95 to 2.50 for traditional relay and for the captioned phone the change is from 1.85 per minute to 1.93. Looking at these two together, the projection is for FY2016 to spend \$219,286 (CapTel and traditional) and that is \$10,870 less than what was paid in 2015. CapTel had a smaller increase in their rate but their minutes are going down so the prediction is that costs aren't going to go up much, and will pay \$22,000 less than what was paid in 2015. But because there is a 55-cent increase per minute, the costs for 2017 and onward will go up a little bit, not much. Approximately about \$14,000 for traditional CapTel will be probably static.

Now that Ms. Sperry is not on staff, temporary services have been utilized and paid but not in personal services and the net effect is that costs are less paying for temporary services as compared to if the position had been held open. All the fixed costs, rent, communications, etc. will remain stable throughout the end of the fiscal year.

As of March 31st, 2016, 1.246 million has been collected as revenue. The quarterly average is about \$226,559 and that's comparable to the quarterly average for the last few years. This quarter has some blank reports, Blackfoot Communication, Blackfoot Telephone Co-op and Range Telephone Co-Op haven't filed yet, Central Montana Communications reported but they closed the account name so now they are reporting as Triangle Telephone Cooperative. Straight Talk is a subsidiary of TracFone so the costs should be coming through TracFone and Verizon reports under Gold Creek.

Hamilton Relay Report: Emilie Banasiak, Lisa Furr

(Lisa Furr) The traffic reports will be skipped and focus will be spent on training on relay and how that's conducted.

(Emilie Banasiak) Ms. Banasiak discusses an event where she and Barbara went to Billings to present a young man with the Hamilton Relay scholarship award. Barbara also shared about the MTAP program with that classroom and it was a great experience for both of them. One of the students there had a brother who has speech difficulties so she was happy to find out that MTAP has the iPad program. The Hamilton Relay has a scholarship award every year for \$500 to give to a deserving high school senior who have either a hearing loss or difficulty speaking or both.

Ms. Banasiak and Ms. Whittaker attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation. It was a huge conference in Kalispell and mostly concentrated on different businesses, banks, chambers of commerce and advertising. Ms. Banasiak said it was a great opportunity to show what is available through MTAP and Hamilton Relay, especially the program educating new businesses about utilizing the relay service.

They also attended the Montana Gerontology Society conference in Billings and this is a conference primarily for people who work with senior citizens, individuals and organizations. This was also a very good outreach opportunity for both Hamilton and MTAP as referrals were made.

After today's meeting, both Ms. Whittaker and Ms. Banasiak are planning on attending a health fair in Pablo and this is an event at the Flathead reservation. Ms. Banasiak stated this will be her first time doing an outreach event on an Indian reservation and is looking forward to learning more.

Plans are to send a gentleman named Paul Stuessy to the Family Learning Weekend for June 4-5 and Mr. Stuessy has been with Hamilton for a long time and will be a good representative of the organization in doing outreach at this event as Ms. Banasiak cannot attend.

Another upcoming conference is the Brain Injury Alliance for Montana and this is slated for September 17 in Missoula. A question was posed as to why outreach with this organization and it was explained that the relay services aren't just for people who are deaf/hard of hearing or deaf-blind but for those who can hear but have difficulty speaking. Brain injuries can fit in this category. They can't process speech as well or need to see the person they're talking with so they can qualify for an iPad or iPhone.

Ms. Banasiak mentioned a sixth event that she plans to attend later in the year which is the MyYouth Transition conference. This conference is geared towards high school students who have disabilities and are transitioning from high school to trade school or college.

According to Ms. Banasiak, Hamilton Relay will be celebrating their 25th anniversary this year. She explained that relay services came about because of the ADA act of 1990 requesting equal access to communication and other accommodations, relay services being one of them. Hamilton Relay offers services in Montana, which is as follows: TTYs, voice carryover, hearing carryover, speech to speech, deaf-blind services, Spanish and captioned telephones. Most of these services have three parties on the phone, the caller and the receiver and the communication assistant in between. The communication assistant has to follow strict federal and state rules to ensure that all the calls are confidential and the CA cannot interject personal opinion into the conversation. The CA also has access to a user profile which can be the relay user's name, address, what type of service they need. If a TTY is used, one can skip the CA in between if the other person has a TTY also. When utilizing a communication assistant, there is a lag time because of the back and forth between the caller and receiver.

In discussing the different services Hamilton Relay offers, a question was posed about the difference between a voice carryover and a CapTel phone. For voice carryover, the caller would have to choose between listening and reading, but with a CapTel, it's similar to watching captioned television. It's a matter of preference with the client. VCOs and CapTels are primarily for people with speech ability but cannot hear very well. With the CapTel, the communication assistant is not noticeable as the CA does not introduce him/herself. The CA on the CapTel relay service does not type, but re-voices everything into a voice recognition software.

Hearing carryover services are for people who hear but have difficulties speaking or do not speak at all.

Another service for that population (people who hear but have imperfect speech) is called speech to speech. No specialized equipment is needed for this service, just register for an account with Hamilton and connect with a communication assistant who is trained to comprehend what the speaker is saying and the caller can customize how they want to speak, if they want the receiver to hear them or just the communication assistant. Hamilton Relay isn't just for deaf and hard of hearing users, but also for others, and there's a population that needs to be more aware of this.

Ms. Furr stated that Ms. Varnum receives an informational report every month on these services and also they are required to report to the FCC any complaints they receive every year. She also mentioned that there are two different kinds of minutes that are counted, session minutes and conversation minutes. Session minutes begins from the time the operator answers the call until hang up; conversation minutes begins when the conversation starts with the location wherever the call is going to, not while the communication assistant is talking with the person who is placing the call.

Ms. Banasiak mentioned that only the speech to speech service requires a customer profile, all the other relay services don't but it's encouraged. Another relay service discussed is their service for the deaf-blind which involves a Braille TTY but MTAP is not involved with that aspect. Ms. Varnum clarified that MTAP only

serves people with both a visual and another disability but there are other programs that help with that, such as the Perkins Grant and the ICanConnect, and MTAP refers clients to those two. Hamilton Relay also does have the capability of serving Spanish-speaking users.

MTAP Equipment report: Julianna Whittaker/Steve Johnson

(Julianna Whittaker) Ms. Whittaker reported that Mr. Johnson brought some phones people to look at and if people want to see what other phones MTAP distributes, the committee members can do that at the office as well. She stated that she's been busy with seeing clients and doing outreach at different conferences. Mr. Johnson echoed this as well and mentioned that they make more effort into meeting people face-to-face, such as with community health workers and speech audiologists in the areas they visit. They both agree that it's crucial to outreach to really spend more time on face-to-face meetings.

Unfinished business

Ms. Kirkland asked if there was any unfinished business to discuss. None mentioned.

New business

Ms. Kirkland stated that she's served on the committee for about 12 years so will not be renewing her appointment on the committee. There will be a need to elect a new chair and a new vice-chair so the floor is open to nominations for those two positions. Mr. Bibler nominated Drew Arnot for chair and Mr. Arnot nominated Ron Bibler for vice-chair. Ms. Kirkland seconded both nominations and opened discussion. There was no discussion so proceeded to vote. No opposition to both nominations.

Discussion ensued about all three MTAP staff members, Ms. Varnum, Ms. Whittaker and Mr. Johnson attending NASRA and TEDPA, in Annapolis, MD. All were in favor – no opposition.

Vote was taken on opening a Missoula office as discussed earlier in the meeting, all was in favor of this happening.

Ms. Kirkland opened up discussion regarding the Myrna Loy requesting a donation from MTAP. The Myrna Loy is requesting funds for purchasing captioned glasses for their facility. The general consensus was that it didn't fit MTAP's mission and goals as MTAP is primarily responsible for distributing specialized telecommunication equipment and there's concern that the legislature would question a donation like this from MTAP. A vote was taken and there was no opposition in deciding not to donate to the Myrna Loy.

Ms. Kirkland closed the meeting with expressing gratitude to the committee for her years with them and wishes them well and stated the next meeting is slated for August 18, 2016.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 pm