Montana Accessible Communications
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
May 21, 2026
University of Montana Western
710 S. Atlantic Street, Dillon, MT 59725

Committee Members Present: Lisa Cannon, chair; Tina Shorten, Ashlee Logan, Cam Tulloch, Lloyd Sparks, Ron Bibler, Barbara Varnum, Gladys Newbury (via Zoom)

MTAC Staff Present: Mary Taylor, Lisa Gault, Jeff Haley, Mike Bouchard, Brittany Boyd, Dawn Hartwell

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Allison LaBrie, Hamilton Relay; Hannah Stokes, budget analyst (via Zoom); Molly Verseput and Jamee Feuling, sign language interpreters; Lisa Lesofski, transcriptionist

Absent committee members: Christy Eichenlaub, Michelle Owens, Dana Kjersem

Meeting called to order:

Lisa Cannon, chair, called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Tina Shorten made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2026, meeting, as presented. Barbara Varnum seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Public Comment: none

MTAC Director's report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor reported that four seats are up for renewal on the committee, which includes licensed audiologist Lisa Cannon; a member of the disability community (deaf or hard of hearing), Ashlee Logan; a member of the disability community (deaf or hard of hearing), Cam Tulloch; and a person without a disability (senior citizen), Barbara Varnum.

There are two vacant seats that need to be filled: a representative for an interLATA carrier and a person with disabilities. Ms. Taylor mentioned the possibility of changing the position of a representative for an interLATA carrier to a speech-language pathologist, but this would require amending the Montana Codes Annotated (MCA) and approval from the legislature. Ron Bibler made a motion to remove the interLATA position from the committee and replace that position with a speech-language pathologist. Barb seconded the motion. Motion carried. Since the Executive Planning Process deadline has passed, the committee will need to find a legislator to sponsor the bill to make this change.

Ms. Taylor reported that, on average, the program received 14 new applications per month in the previous fiscal year (FY2025), and as of April 30th, 2026, the average has dropped to 12 new applications per month. It was noted that there will be a change to MTAC's definition of income; this has not been done yet, as paperwork is required to make the change effective.

Advertising for the program's services has been placed in movie theaters, newspapers, supermarkets, and at sporting events. Ms. Taylor has added sponsorship of ASL-interpreted performances at Grandstreet Theatre in Helena, as they offer one interpreted performance each show during the season.

Advertising for yesterday's May outreach event at the University of Montana Western was done through the Dillon Tribune, Southwestern Montana News, radio, and Facebook, in addition to signage around town that Jeff distributed. Brittany Boyd, the outreach coordinator, created a flyer that was distributed, and she contacted many organizations to participate in the wellness fair. There were some comments regarding the timing of the event, being in the middle of the week or the middle of the day, as possibly being a factor in low attendance. One suggestion was to join an already occurring event that closely coincides with the day of the quarterly meeting. There has been previous success in engaging diverse age groups and leveraging existing events to drive traffic.

Ms. Taylor mentioned that, normally, a Relay Friendly Business (RFB) training is scheduled for the spring, but this year, one was not planned because the Hamilton Relay contract had not yet been signed. Names have been taken from individuals who have expressed interest in participating in the training and will be contacted once a date has been set for the next RFB training.

The Facebook data for this past quarter has improved, with reach increasing by 24% and interactions increasing by 23%. The top-performing post was one Ms. Boyd posted while attending the Family Health and Resource Expo in Lewistown, with a photo of the event included. The top-performing advertisement was for the Women's Fair in Kalispell, which Jeff Haley, Brittany Boyd, and Dawn Hartwell attended. A question was asked about whether Ms. Boyd will take over posting on Facebook, since she is the outreach specialist, and whether MTAC will discontinue using Devaney & Associates. This is something that MTAC will consider in the future.

The website traffic report has improved after Ms. Taylor worked with the webmaster and discovered there were some errors in the reporting software. The errors occurred around the time MTAC updated their name to Montana Accessible Communications, and the website URL changed. There were nearly 3,000 visits this past quarter to the MTAC webpage. A QR code has been created for the outreach tables to encourage people visiting the tables at outreach events to visit the website.

Ms. Taylor continues to work on the following MTAC contracts:

- Specialized Assistive Equipment: Currently awaiting signatures on documents before the Invitation For Bid (IFB) can be released publicly. Lisa Cannon, Mike Bouchard, and Mary Taylor will be reviewing the bid documents and selecting a contractor. The current contract ends May 26, 2026.
- Baker Tilly/Sockeye (database management): Execution of the current contract amendment is still in process. Once executed, that contract ends September 30, 2026. Moving the database to the cloud is planned but has been delayed due to contract uncertainty and the procurement process. The funds allocated for the database move ($50,000) may be shifted to the next fiscal year due to slow progress. Ms. Taylor will begin working on the contract documents to secure a new contract for database management once the current one expires in September.
- Hamilton Relay (Montana Relay): For the Hamilton Relay contract, it was begun as a sole-source procurement. Ms. Taylor was told to treat it as a service-level agreement, but procurement later reverted to a sole-source arrangement, and Ms. Taylor had to redo some of the forms.
- Facebook: The process to renew MTAC's Facebook contract with Devaney for FY2027 is underway. The current one-year renewal ends June 30, 2026. This contract is renewable in one-year increments through the year 2030.

Ms. Taylor explained that the procurement department has changed its forms and requirements for signing contracts and the State Information Technology Services Division (SITSD) added Information Technology terms and conditions to the contract, which has caused some delays with the contractors who have questions about the added requirements. In addition, procurement is experiencing a backlog with all the contracts they are reviewing.

The Administrative Rules have been updated with the 2025 income guidelines and posted on the website. The 2026 guidelines will be updated soon.

ASL Now, now known as CSD Access, is a service that allows a deaf person to visit a website and connect directly with a company representative who communicates in American Sign Language (ASL). Ms. Taylor is continuing to work on the test pilot of this service with other organizations, such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and to schedule training.

Budget Report: Hannah Stokes

Hannah Stokes reported on the state fiscal year 2026 budget totals for MTAC as of April 30, 2026.

Personal services	$511,821
Operations	$883,403
FCC Mandate	$775,000
Total budget	$2,170,224

Actual expenses through April 30, 2026

MTAC program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (53% of the $1,395,224)	$740,134
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	$50,481
Prior year expense	($3,941)
Total expenses for program	$786,675

House Bill 2 expenditures through April 30, 2026

Personal services (54% of $511,821 PS projected budget)	$276,079
Operational expenses (53% of $883,403 OP projected budget)	$464,056
Total expenses (53% of $1,395,224 total HB2 budget)	$740,134

Revenue collected as of April 30, 2026 - $1,645,599

SFY 2026 actual expenses through April 30, 2026

Operating Expenses through April 30, 2026 - SFY 2026 - $740,134

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures $113,684
- Outreach – total expenditures $187,794
- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures $40,346
- Travel – total expenditures $9,256

- Supplies – total expenditures $1,069
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures $55,047
- Other Expenses/Equipment – total expenditures $6,895
- Communications – total expenditures $4,100
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures $9,286
- Other services – total expenditures $36,580

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses
- Actual costs for SFY 2026 indirect costs are $50,481

- FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time.

DPHHS report – Sarah Seltzer/Mary Taylor

Ms. Taylor let the committee know that Sarah Seltzer is in another meeting, but she sent an update via email, which she will read. For the Voc-Rehab order of selection, eligible individuals in all priority categories are being placed on a waiting list. Ms. Seltzer and others are working on the executive planning process (EPP) for the upcoming legislative session. A request to update MCA 53-19-302 has been submitted to DPHHS to expand the language from "specialized telecommunication equipment" to "communication equipment," allowing MTAC to assist clients with various communication barriers beyond phone equipment.

MTAC Outreach Report – Brittany Boyd

Brittany Boyd presented a summary of what she has been doing this past quarter, including helping to prepare orders for supplies needed for outreach events and participating in several outreach events, such as the Bozeman Spring Home Show and the Family Health and Resource Expo in Lewistown, among others. There are a few outreach events coming up that she will attend, such as the Medical Health Fair in Deer Lodge and the Wellness Expo in Bozeman. Ms. Boyd conducted a home visit and continues to learn about the equipment that MTAC distributes. She has been planning posts that will be advertised on Facebook, such as outreach events, holidays, and items that highlight the Deaf community, as well as posting pictures. Ms. Boyd also monitors and responds to comments on the MTAC Facebook account.

Ms. Boyd has participated in trainings such as accessibility for web design and learning about quarterly inventory tracking. Her to-do list going forward includes learning more about the iPad and the applications used, visiting the speech-language pathologists in Bozeman and other areas, and creating a new, updated brochure for MTAC. She will continue taking trainings that pertain to Facebook, such as social media marketing strategy and optimization, advanced Facebook advertising and marketing.

MTAC Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard, Jeff Haley, and Dawn Hartwell

Mike Bouchard mentioned that he did not do as much outreach this quarter and that he has stopped attending the Home Improvement Show in Great Falls but continues to attend the Home Show in Billings. He did a training at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy (MLEA) with Dawn Hartwell in April, and there will be another MLEA training in August that he will attend with Ms. Hartwell. He and Ms. Boyd worked a table at the Health Expo in White Sulphur Springs, and the attendance was less than in previous years, most likely due to the weather.

Mr. Bouchard will attend the Bridging Montana event at the end of the month (May) in Billings and continues to take care of new clients and service current clients.

Jeff Haley attended an event in Polson called Navigating the Road to Life, which focuses on high school kids, as well as the Women's Fair in Kalispell, where he teamed up with Brittany Boyd and Dawn Hartwell. Mr. Haley also attended the annual Blackfeet Communications meeting, which attracts many senior citizens. Ms. Hartwell joined Mr. Haley at the Women's Fair in Missoula, and he did the Home and Garden Show in Missoula. He also spent a day in Dillon, assisting with the distribution of the flyers for MTAC's May outreach event.

Dawn Hartwell added that she has been learning from the others about preparing for outreach events and has been going through the city of Helena to identify potential contacts, dropping off brochures, and talking with people. She has set up a few lunch-and-learn events at senior centers and will help with Tech Tuesdays at the Helena library. Ms. Hartwell thanked Jeff Haley and Mike Bouchard for their assistance when issues arose during client visits. She worked on the inventory for the Helena office with Mary Taylor and recycled devices that had expired warranties. Ms. Hartwell is currently working on a document that will serve as a resource for using iOS devices (iPad and iPhone). She has taken training on iOS 18.

Hamilton Relay Report – Allison LaBrie

Allison LaBrie reported as follows:

Traditional Relay Service (TRS) percentage answered in ten seconds – 98% - above the requirement of 85%.

CapTel percentage answered in 10 seconds – 100%.

Session and conversation minutes remain low, with a trend toward digital and fiber-based communication, reducing analog usage.

Quality scores remain high above average company-wide at 99 % for TRS, with a 67 for a typing words per minute average (requirement is 60 words per minute). For CapTel quality scores, the calculation has changed because all captions use automatic speech recognition (ASR) and are assisted by the communication assistant (CA). The word error rate (WER) is used for calculation, as it is the total number of errors detected divided by the total word count, and the requirement is to be under 2 percent. The WER for the most recent month was .73%.

Customer care contacts for TRS from January to March 2026 include one general information question and wrong numbers.

Customer care contacts for CapTel – there were none for January-March 2026.

Remote conference captioning minutes tend to be higher when the committee meets quarterly and lower in the other months. There were no outreach events done with Hamilton Relay to report.

Unfinished business – No listed unfinished business.

New business

- **MTAC FCC Mandate and appropriation changes**

  Budget Analyst Ms. Stokes led the discussion on the MCC Mandate and appropriation changes. She explained that between 2011 and 2017, the FCC observed that captioned telephone services for the hard of hearing had grown beyond initial forecasts, raising concerns about a shortfall in the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) fund, federal funds allocated specifically to that service. The

FCC created the mandate to control the costs of captioned telephone services for people who are hard of hearing. The mandate focuses on rulemaking, cost control, and the use of automatic speech recognition to reduce expenses. The court order is for financial reform and for reducing internal waste before shifting costs to external factors, such as the states. Automatic speech recognition was approved because it reduces the costs of hiring human captioners.

The original $775,000 set aside in the MTAC budget for the mandate was established in 2017 in anticipation of the FCC shifting costs to the state of Montana. The actual costs are likely higher now, and because the mandate has never shifted costs since 2017, the fiscal staff is proposing in the upcoming legislative session to remove the FCC mandate appropriation line, as it has been unused for ten-plus years. They have confirmed with the FCC that it will not change its current model until around 2029. Therefore, an EPP request will be made for this line item.

MTAC receives revenue from a ten-cent fee on every 406 number, generating over $1.7 million annually. The program's appropriations are much lower, around $800,000 to $ 900,000, leading to large unspent balances (revenue outpaces expenditures). MTAC would like to increase spending to match revenue levels and enable program growth. The division has already submitted requests for the 2028-2029 biennium to increase appropriations.

- **Aira Video Remote Interpreting**
  Ms. Taylor explained that she received an email from Chanda Hermanson, the Division Administrator, recently, who was gathering public comment for the vocational rehabilitation state plan, and they received some feedback from the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) requesting funding by MTAC for Aira, the visual interpreting services for the blind and low vision. Visual interpreting uses modern telecommunication technology to provide readers and scribe services, navigation, and sign language interpreting services via mobile telephone or Windows computers. Ms. Taylor had asked Ms. Hartwell to do some research to share with the Committee today, to consider offering this service for the NFB. Ms. Hartwell and Mr. Bouchard checked into it and explained that the cost to geofence an area annually is around $250, and that it's up to $3 per minute to use the service. Ms. Taylor said it is comparable to the cost of Remote Conference Captioning, plus the geofencing fee per site. After some discussion, the Committee determined that, since this service does not involve access to phone communication, it does not fall within the MTAC program's services; it would require a change in statute and the program's mission.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:37 p.m.