

Montana Accessible Communications
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
May 15, 2025
Yogo Inn
Lewistown, Montana

Committee Members Present: Lisa Cannon, chair; Tina Shorten, Ron Bibler, Barbara Varnum, Cam Tulloch, Ashlee Logan (via Zoom), Dana Kjersem, Bob Terwilliger (via Zoom), Michelle Owens (via Zoom), Lee Hazelbaker

Committee Members Absent: Tom Thompson, John Pavao, Christy Eichenlaub

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

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Sarah Seltzer, deputy administrator (via Zoom); Emilie Banasiak (via Zoom) and Allison LaBrie, Hamilton Relay; Hannah Stokes, budget analyst (via Zoom); Shawn Tulloch, VR counselor; Cathy Copeland and Annie Fischer, sign language interpreters; Lisa Lesofski, CART provider; Lloyd Sparks, Department of Administration

Meeting called to order:

Lisa Cannon called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Barbara Varnum made a motion to approve the February 2024 meeting minutes and amend the minutes to reflect the under “Approval of Minutes” the clarification that the committee had approved the “November 2024” meeting minutes. Michelle Owens seconded. The minutes were approved with the amendment.

MTAC Director’s report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor let the committee know that the MTAP Committee PSAP position has been filled with Christy Eichenlaub. Several positions on the committee are coming up for renewal effective July 1st, including Ron Bibler, Lee Hazelbaker, John Pavao, Bob Terwilliger and Tom Thompson. John Pavao has announced he is retiring on July 1st, 2025, and Lloyd Sparks will most likely be taking the position John Pavao is vacating upon retirement. Ms. Taylor mentioned that there will be an election to vote for the new chair and new vice chair later in the meeting.

Ms. Taylor reported that new applications coming into the office are staying steady as last year the average per month was 13 and so far, this year the average is 14. Outreach is still ongoing by attending home shows and wellness fairs which Jeff Haley and Mike Bouchard will cover later in the meeting. Jeff Haley attended the annual Blackfoot Communications meeting and Mike Bouchard attended the 3 Rivers Communication annual meeting. There will be some upcoming events for the summer such as the Family Learning weekend at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, continued visits to the senior centers around the state and a baseball game in Billings.

A Relay Friendly Business training was hosted by Montana Accessible Communications (MTAC) and Hamilton Relay recently at the end of April. With the recent addition of five newly certified Relay Friendly Businesses, there are twenty-two businesses that are certified as being relay friendly. Ms. Taylor wants to

promote these businesses and will develop a flyer that will be used at outreach events, titled “Visit our Relay Friendly businesses” with a list of the certified businesses. The next training is scheduled for October 2025.

While planning the May outreach event in Lewistown, Ms. Taylor shared that the director of the senior center in Lewistown recently resigned, leaving them unable to coordinate with us on the event. She did reserve a local church for the venue, but in the process, discovered another event that takes place in Lewistown around the same time— the Family Health & Resource Expo. It was decided that MTAC would attend this event in place of a separate outreach event in Lewistown. Lisa Cannon also attended and hosted a table on behalf of MSDB.

In reference to the Facebook report, Ms. Taylor said there were more impressions, which means more people see the posts, but the clicks went down. The highest performing post that was not paid for with advertising dollars was the post wishing MTAC’s administrative assistant, Lisa Gault, a happy Administrative Professionals Day. The top performing paid advertisement was the promotion of the Missoula Home and Garden show event which was followed closely by the Great Falls Home and Garden show, attended by Jeff Haley and Mike Bouchard, respectively.

The MTAC website reports have been showing a lot of errors, partly because of the name change and the path leading to the website that changed. In addition, DPHHS has almost moved some things around, causing some additional changes to the paths. The staff will continue to monitor and make corrections where possible. The bounce rate has been a little higher, which is an indication that people are having issues and not going further into the website.

Ms. Taylor has been working on contracts renewals. The Teltex equipment contract will be renewed for another year as well as the Sockeye database agreement and the Facebook management and advertising agreement. The Hamilton Relay contract is good until February 2026 as it was a three-year renewal. There will be an RFP for the Hamilton Relay contract as it is the end of the ten years as of February 2026. In addition, both the equipment contract and database contract are at the end of their 10-year contract term and new contracts will need to be procured.

There has been discussion about moving the MTAC database from the server to the cloud. IT and several others have contacted MTAC about planning this move but as of this date, the contract with Sockeye will go forward through next June 2026 and in the meantime, research is being conducted by IT and Sockeye. Microsoft and Sockeye are both submitting cost proposals for moving the database from the server to the cloud.

Ms. Taylor is working on updating the MTAC Income Guidelines for the year 2024. Not a lot has changed regarding the Administrative Rules since the last meeting. In reference to the overhaul of the MTAC Administrative Rules (which contain changes to the appeals process and income definition to name a few) Ms. Taylor explained that she will start the process of requesting those changes, starting with the decision brief. Once that is approved, the process can move forward in the system.

In closing, Ms. Taylor mentioned that MTAC staff participated in the annual security training recently, and that there are some changes that happened during the legislative session about the request for additional funding that Sarah Seltzer will discuss later in the meeting.

Budget Report: Hannah Stokes

Hannah Stokes reported on the state fiscal year 2025 budget totals for MTAC as of April 30, 2025.

Personal services	\$351,557
Operations	\$599,447
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,726,004</u></u>

Actual expenses through April 30, 2025

MTAC program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (72% of the \$951,004)	\$686,393
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$73,603
Prior year expense	(\$6)
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$759,990</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through April 30, 2025

Personal services (72% of \$351,557 PS projected budget)	\$253,390
Operational expenses (72% of \$599,447 OP projected budget)	<u>\$433,003</u>
Total expenses (72% of \$951,004 total HB2 budget)	\$686,393

Revenue collected as of April 30, 2025 - \$1,655,204

SFY 2025 actual expenses through April 30, 2025

Operating Expenses through April 30, 2025 - SFY 2025 - \$686,393

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures \$28,603
- Outreach – total expenditures \$136,145
- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$38,135
- Travel – total expenditures \$7,735
- Supplies – total expenditures \$2,724
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures \$61,328
- Other Expenses/Equipment – total expenditures \$6,722
- Communications – total expenditures \$7,131
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures \$7,268
- Other services – total expenditures \$29,905

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2025 indirect costs are \$73,603
- FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time.

DPHHS report – Sarah Seltzer

Sarah Seltzer reported that the legislature has ended their session, and they are waiting for the final signature from the Governor on the final budget for the biennium. MTAC was awarded an additional \$500,000 per year in appropriation. That will enable MTAC to hire two additional full-time staff members. Ms. Seltzer, Ms. Taylor and Hannah Stokes will be working on job descriptions for those positions and advertising will happen later in the summer.

For the Disability Employment and Transitions office (DET), the vocational rehabilitation program (VR) was allocated two additional VR counselors specifically designated to serve the Severely Disabled Mental Illness population (SDMI). The workload and caseloads will be different, and the counselors will be hired for the Great Falls and Billings offices as those offices have the structure (Individualized Placement Services – IPS) to work with that population. This structure/model is a little different model compared to the regular VR program.

Another positive for the DET, they were approved to create a Blind Adjustment program. To receive blind adjustment services, one must fit one of two categories – be a client of the VR program or be 55 years old or older. If someone does not fall into one of those two categories, there is currently no resource to support people who are adjusting to blindness or low vision. This approval to create a new program will greatly assist those who do not fit into the mentioned categories and another staff member will be added to support this new program.

The Disability Determinations Service Bureau chief position is still vacant due to a federal hiring freeze. Ms. Seltzer, Chanda Hermanson and some others have been stepping in to assist while the position is vacant. A second budget analyst has been hired for the division, Nur McRae. She began working on April 21st.

The VR program hosted the third annual Disability Employment Summit, aimed at engaging employers, helping employers understand how to work with people with disabilities and letting them know what resources are available in the community. This event was held in Missoula at the university.

Discussion ensued on the additional money that was approved through the Montana legislature. One clarification is that the \$500,000 will be partly allocated for the two new positions and the rest will be decided by MTAC on what to use the money for such as equipment for clients and topics that have come up during the strategic planning process.

MTAC Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Jeff Haley discussed some of the outreach that he has done this past quarter such as the Missoula Home and Garden show and the Blackfoot Communications annual meeting. He mentioned that the Missoula Home and Garden show had more of a general population whereas the annual meeting had more senior citizens in attendance. Both had very good turnouts, and he was able to talk with people. Mr. Haley mentioned another group that he met with - the high school students - which was the Navigating the Road to Life event which was held at the Polson Boys and Girls Club. He will be attending the Women 4 Wellness event in Pablo later this month, which is an event more focused on the Native American population.

Mike Bouchard reported that he attended the Billings Home Show, which is one of the biggest in the state, and he feels it is good exposure to get the program recognized even if not many applications occur as a result of attending the show, especially with the program name change. He also attended the Three Rivers annual

meeting, and the Great Falls Home Show. Mr. Bouchard will not do the Great Falls show next year as he wants to change things up and go to the Bozeman Home Show, which he has never done but will continue doing the Billings home show. He and Lisa Cannon both hosted tables at the Family Health and Resource Expo in Lewistown last month and were surprised at how many children were at this expo. Mr. Bouchard felt this was a worthwhile event to attend again next year as this event was his first time attending and good exposure for the program. Mr. Bouchard did an event in White Sulphur Springs which is a very early event, beginning at 7 a.m. and he saw a lot of older people attend that event as it is a health fair and they do offer blood draws, so it is beneficial to have the event early if the attendees have been fasting. A new event came up – the Statewide Independent Living Council ADA Resource Fair which was held in three towns, Sidney, Miles City, and Hardin. Mr. Bouchard interacted with people all three days and he felt it was beneficial in getting the program name out there.

Mr. Bouchard did a Montana Law Enforcement Academy (MLEA) training last month with new dispatchers. It was a full class, with about 29 students and he had good interaction with the students. For the text to 911 program, there are still three counties left to upgrade to offering this service (Flathead, Daniels, and Musselshell).

Discussion ensued about education on the use of Live Captions for iOS phones and Live Transcribe for the Android phones. Another suggestion for an event is the Great Plains Veterans Stand Down that is held at the Rocky Boy reservation. MTAC will keep this in mind for future events.

Hamilton Relay Report – Allison LaBrie and Emilie Banasiak

Allison LaBrie reported the percentage of calls answered within 10 seconds for the traditional relay service and it was at 98 percent for the last quarter and for calls answered within 10 seconds for CapTel service it was at 100 percent for the last quarter. For traditional relay service sessions and conversation minutes there have been some minor fluctuations but the average remains the same.

For the CapTel session and conversation minutes, the decline continues mainly due to the switch from analog to digital lines. The quality scores involve having a requirement of 60 words per minute with 95 percent accuracy for traditional relay service and it has remained above that in score. For the quality scores involving CapTel phones, the standard is 135 words per minute and 98 percent accuracy with a 2 percent error and the communication assistants are maintaining above this requirement.

In reference to the Customer Care Contact report for CapTel there have been none this past quarter and for the Traditional Relay Customer Care Contact report, not a lot of those, just a few wrong number/hangups, questions about equipment, outreach and one inquiry about Remote Conference Captioning.

For the Relay Conference Captioning Minutes – those minutes tend to fluctuate depending on the month and appear to coincide with MTAP Committee meetings, for which this service is used.

Emilie Banasiak reported on conducting a Relay Friendly Business webinar training recently and will be doing the first round of testing of those who have participated in the webinar on April 30th within the next few weeks. For the upcoming quarter, she will attend the Family Learning Weekend in Great Falls at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind. She will also attend the Montana Governor's Conference on Aging later in the year.

Unfinished business –

New business – Election of Committee Chair/Vice Chair

Mr. Bibler nominated Dana Kjersem for vice chair and Ms. Varnum seconded the nomination. Ms. Varnum nominated Cam Tulloch as vice chair. A follow-up ballot vote was conducted, and Dana Kjersem was voted to be the new vice chair.

Ms. Shorten nominated Lisa Cannon to serve a second term as chair and Mr. Bibler seconded. All voted in favor of Lisa Cannon continuing to serve a second term as the chair.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.