

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

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

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

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Shannon Mackey, budget analyst; Emilie Banasiak, Asia Johnson (via Zoom), Hamilton Relay; Shawn Tulloch, deaf services manager (via Zoom), Stella Woodrum and Trisha Smith, sign language interpreters; Nicole Weitzman and Anna Gibbs were visitors

Meeting called to order:

Barbara Varnum called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Tina Shorten made a motion to approve the minutes with the correction of Ms. Varnum's comment at the previous meeting about having a discussion on doing away with the financial need criteria so that anyone can apply. The motion was seconded by Lisa Cannon and the motion was approved.

Public Comment: Mary Taylor addressed the members of the public, clarifying procedures on the public comment portion of the meeting as being the specific time set aside for anyone who wants to speak publicly, expressing that the public is welcome to address anything on the agenda or otherwise during the "Public Comment" portion of the meeting, as long as it germane to MTAP business and not disruptive, threatening or discourteous. No public comment was presented.

MTAP Director's report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor opened by welcoming the two new members of the committee, Bob Terwilliger and Michelle Owens, and mentioned that some of the positions have been renewed (Tina Shorten, Sheri Odlin, and Jim Streeter). In addition, some positions are due for renewal this summer (Tom Thompson, Ron Bibler, Lee Hazelbaker, John Pavao and Chanda Hermanson).

Ms. Taylor reported that new applications have gone up a bit and advertising is ongoing via Facebook and in state-wide newspapers. New brochure holders were ordered, and the staff will place them in various businesses across the state with brochures and applications, in effort to increase program awareness. MTAP has undertaken a new advertising campaign this year, encouraging businesses to participate in a training to become a Relay-Friendly Business. If a business participates in this training, they get a decal to place in their storefront window, a certificate, a digital "Relay Friendly Business" image to place on their website, and will also be included on a list of relay-friendly businesses posted on the MTAP and Hamilton Relay website. As part of the Relay Friendly Business Awareness promotion, Ms. Taylor was interviewed by the local TV station, along with one of the local businesses who signed up to become relay friendly, to further encourage participation and awareness of

Montana Relay. The first Relay Friendly Business Training took place on February 1st, with around 30 participants from across the state. MTAP will continue to promote Relay Friendly Business training via TV advertising, through December.

In conjunction with the Governor's OGSM (Objectives, Goals, Strategies and Measures) initiative, MTAP has committed to focusing on increasing outreach efforts to veterans. As part of this effort, Ms. Taylor has been attending a monthly meeting of Joining Community Forces Veteran Wellness and Recovery, and last quarter, she went to a couple of veterans' outreach events to share information about MTAP.

Ms. Taylor mentioned that the report for the MTAP Facebook page, shows that the total reach, which is the definition of number of unique people who saw the content, and the interactions, which is the number of likes/reactions to the posts increased some. The bounce rate is down a little which is good, because it means that people are coming into the website and not leaving after the first page. The website was updated a year ago and resources are continually added to the website.

The report for the remote conference captioning minutes shows an average of 1,300 minutes with an increase of more minutes the last two months. Ms. Taylor mentioned that she reviews the reports each month and has seen no indications of misuse of services.

The FCC requires an annual data report showing all the minutes that are paid for throughout the year for both the traditional relay and CapTel and that report is due by February 25, 2022. Ms. Taylor is working on getting this report submitted.

The new federal poverty levels were published in January by the Department of Health and Human Services. Ms. Taylor has submitted the paperwork to update the Administrative Rules of Montana to make the change to the MTAP Income Guidelines, which are based on 250% of the Federal Poverty Level. Discussion ensued regarding the federal poverty level with Ms. Varnum asking about eliminating the financial means criteria for MTAP. Mr. Terwilliger suggested that maybe just reducing the 250% to 200% or 150% would be more doable than eliminating it completely. Ms. Cannon added that legislators look at how much money is there, and projections expected and demographic information. Ms. Taylor added that the clients who apply and don't qualify still can get assistance from MTAP in terms of recommendations, and phones that are out of warranty can be given out. Ms. Hermanson will begin some conversations just to get a general idea of how this change would be received.

Contract renewals are coming due the end of June, according to Ms. Taylor. Teltex, contractor for equipment purchase; Sockeye, contractor for the database software that is used to track our equipment; and Devaney, the contractor for Facebook management and advertising, will all be worked on in the coming months to prepare for renewal. The committee determined there was no need for them to approve the moving forward of contract renewals, so Ms. Taylor will proceed on renewing the contracts.

For the May meeting, it will be held in Havre and the tech fair/outreach event will be at the senior center there the day prior (May 18). Ms. Taylor has been in contact with the Senior Center Director in Havre, who is excited to help sponsor this event. He will cover the cost of advertising in the local newspaper and on the radio. Ms. Taylor will work on inviting other agencies to join them at this event; there is room for 10-12 vendors.

Ms. Taylor is planning a Deaf World training for the August meeting with a person from the Disability Employment Transitions department who specializes in Windmills training.

In July, the NASRA/TEDPA meetings will take place in Indianapolis, Indiana. Committee members are welcome to attend. Cam Tulloch expressed interest in attending TEDPA.

Budget Report: Shannon Mackey

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

Personal services	\$252,154
Operations	\$627,677
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,654,831</u></u>

Actual expenses through January 31, 2022

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (46.44% of the \$879,311)	\$408,612
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$22,370
Prior year expense	\$210
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$431,192</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures

Personal services (50.35% of \$279,800 PS projected budget)	\$140,875
Operational expenses (44.62% of \$600,031 OE projected budget)	<u>\$267,737</u>
Total expenses (46.44% of \$879,831 total HB2 budget)	<u>\$408,612</u>

Operating Expenses – SFY 2022 \$267,737

Hamilton Relay Services – total actual expenditures \$96,962
total relay budget \$250,00, remaining \$150,038

Outreach – total actual expenditures \$71,111
total outreach budget \$129,511, remaining \$58,400

Rent/Utilities – total actual expenditures \$23,438
total rent budget \$42,500, remaining \$19,062

Travel – total actual expenditures \$3,852
total travel budget \$14,000, remaining \$10,148

Supplies – total actual expenditures \$1,698
total supply budget \$6,520, remaining \$4,822

Distribution equipment (including Teltex) – total actual expenditures \$41,771
total equipment budget \$100,000, remaining \$58,229

Other expenses/equipment – total actual expenditures \$4,855

total other expenses budget \$9,000, remaining \$4,145

Communications – total actual expenditures \$4,553
total communications budget \$6,500, remaining \$1,947

Repairs/Maintenance (vehicles) total actual expenditures \$4,560
total repairs/maintenance budget \$10,000, remaining \$5,440

Other services – total actual expenditures \$14,938
total other services budget \$32,000, remaining \$17,062

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses
- Actual costs for SFY 2022 indirect costs are \$22,370
- projected costs for SFY 2022 indirect costs are \$73,000

FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time

Revenue collected as of January 31, 2022, \$1,105,638

DPHHS Report – Chanda Hermanson

Chanda Hermanson opened with the ongoing discussion of the MTAP reserves, explaining that every phone line in Montana has a ten-cent tax which is where the reserve money comes from. \$775,000 is reserved for the FCC mandate. Currently it's over a million dollars. Every time a legislative session happens, and the budget is looked at, they see an excess of funds. They use the excess to support other programs. That's always a concern to the committee. The question is how to keep the reserves at \$775,000 and when revenue comes in that's over that amount, how to route that money directly to MTAP to go to the population that MTAP serves. Would a statute be needed through legislature, or go through the Administrative Rules or have the Governor's office make an executive decision? This is being discussed and researched currently. There has been discussion about reducing the 10-cent tax as well. Ms. Hermanson thinks it'd be a good idea to have a townhall meeting to let people share ideas as well.

The red tape forum initiative is a high priority for the current administration and analysis has been done of all the Administrative Rules and prioritized rules that need to be repealed, adjusted, or reduced where barriers are being put up that are unnecessary for Montana communities to engage with state government. Ms. Hermanson reported that the final priority list was submitted to the Lieutenant Governor. The two priorities related to MTAP are the process on appeals, if a customer is dissatisfied with a decision or an adverse action with MTAP, they would come to this committee and the committee would decide and no one in legal or the Fair Hearings Office is comfortable with that. The second one is the conditions of acceptance form which is an agreement between MTAP and the clients about their responsibilities with the equipment.

Ms. Hermanson mentioned that all the grant programs in Disability Employment and DPHHS are under continuing resolution pots of money which started on the Federal fiscal year of October 1st. There has been no executive budget passed yet at the federal level. There will be a third continuing resolution that was just passed that will carry the program through March. For vocational rehabilitation, there are less than 1,000 people waiting for services. At one point it was 3,800 people so the number on the wait list has gone down. Through the American Rescue Plan Act, they worked with the Governor's office and the workforce commission and

received approval for \$2 million to hire ten temporary staff members through December 2023 to augment the current VR staff to get these people off the waiting list.

Hamilton Relay Report: Emilie Banasiak and Asia Johnson

Asia Johnson began by mentioning that as of January 1st, 2022, Hamilton CapTel is the only provider of IP CapTel service. This is CapTel service delivered over the Internet. The FCC has extended the waiver for answer performance standards to March 31st of 2022, due to the ongoing pandemic.

For the traditional relay service, 85 percent of all calls are to be answered in 10 seconds or less. Overall, the TRS for Montana has been consistent with this. For CapTel service, the performance has been closer to 100 percent for calls answered in 10 seconds. For the TRS call volume it's been consistent and for the CapTel call volume there has been a decline over the last few years. Customer care contacts for October, November, and December for TRS mainly consisted of questions for general information, one was for equipment and one complaint and one wrong number. For the CapTel customer care – one customer reached out for assistance with set up.

Emilie Banasiak shared that she has been doing some virtual events for outreach as part of the six events Hamilton Relay partners with MTAP on. Three of them were 911 webinars, working with local 911 centers in the state. She also did a Relay Friendly business statewide webinar with MTAP which trains businesses on how to identify relay calls, what to do on a relay call and other types of calls. An upcoming outreach event will be the Family Learning Weekend at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) in June.

MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Jeff Haley reported that there are more applications coming in and senior centers are starting to open again which is keeping the equipment technicians busy. Most of the installs are amplified phones and more outreach opportunities will be done in the coming quarter. He mentioned that the staff are excited about using the Owl units for the audio and visual aspects of the committee meetings to enable people to hear each other and see each other whether on Zoom or in person.

Mike Bouchard added that the Owl equipment is so much better as it has a 360 panoramic view and through the software, it can map the room using the cameras and microphones. As for acoustics, it depends on where people are located, such as Ms. Hermanson was between the two Owls, and it kept switching back and forth. Mr. Bouchard added that when they start up, they hoot like an owl.

Unfinished business

Ms. Varnum asked if the committee is definite on going to Havre in May. The tech fair/outreach event will be on May 18th and the meeting on May 19th.

New business

Contract renewals are not needed to be voted on.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:25 p.m.