

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
May 18, 2023
Glendive, Montana

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

MTAP Staff Present: Mary Taylor, Lisa Gault, Mike Bouchard, Jeff Haley (via Zoom)

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Shannon Mackey, budget analyst (via Zoom); Hannah Stokes, budget analyst (via Zoom), Asia Johnson (via Zoom) and Emilie Banasiak, Hamilton Relay; Annie Fischer and Cathy Copeland, sign language interpreters, Shawn Tulloch, program manager for deaf services (via Zoom)

Meeting called to order:

Barbara Varnum called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Tina Shorten moved to approve the November 17, 2022, minutes with John Pavao seconding the motion. Motion carried.

Ron Bibler moved to approve the February 16, 2023, minutes with Tina Shorten seconding the motion. Motion carried. Ms. Taylor reminded the committee that there was no quorum during the February meeting, so the notes will not be published publicly.

Public Comment: No public comment

MTAP Director's report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor reported that committee has three seats up for renewal this summer, which are Lisa Cannon, Barbara Varnum and Cam Tulloch. She still has not heard from the governor's office on the renewals from last summer for Tom Thompson, Ron Bibler, Lee Hazelbaker and Chanda Hermanson's position. Two people have applied for Ms. Hermanson's position representing DPHHS (Dept. of Public Health and Human Services.) Ms. Taylor has been attempting to get confirmation from the governor's office over the last several months and is still awaiting a response. A plaque has been created for Jim Streeter since he resigned from the committee and a plaque will be made for Chanda Hermanson as well, in appreciation of their service on committee. Ms. Taylor reminded the committee that an election will take place later in the meeting to elect the new chair and vice chair for the next two-year term.

In reference to new applications for services, Ms. Taylor noted that there has been a significant drop in applications; 30% compared to a year ago. Ms. Taylor is not sure why there is a decrease other than a shift at times in the focus of advertising to relay friendly business training, versus the equipment distribution service. A committee member questioned whether it was because of the change from analog phone lines to digital/fiber.

Ms. Taylor replied that this could be a possibility. Discussion ensued on how people are moving away from landlines to phones and computers with all the different apps available. Ms. Taylor also mentioned that CaptionCall has been advertising their phones extensively on television, and they are a competitor in a sense for the captioning phones. Also, some people cannot afford having Internet services, which is not required for the CaptionCall phones.

The staff have been busy doing outreach at the home and garden shows, health fairs and senior centers. Upcoming outreach will include visiting Montana School for the Deaf and Blind for their Family Learning Weekend in June and doing a relay friendly business webinar on June 20th. The outreach event in Glendive the day prior to today's meeting was successful, Ms. Taylor felt, despite the smoke that was heavy around Glendive. She had advertised the event through TV, newspapers, radio, and social media and when asking the people in attendance, she was surprised at how many said they saw it on Facebook. There were close to 50 members of the public who showed up.

For Facebook advertising, there was not a lot of change to report other than streamlining how posts are being made with local events and Devaney and Associates posting information. The MTAP website seems to vary from quarter to quarter in usage. If there are promotions occurring that lead people to the website that helps such as the relay friendly business trainings where people must go register via the website.

The contract with Hamilton Relay was recently renewed through February of 2026. The contracts up for renewal are Teltex (equipment), Sockeye (database software agreement) and Devaney & Associates (Facebook management and advertising). The Teltex and Devaney & Associates contract amendments are out for signature and the Sockeye contract has been signed and renewed through June 30, 2024.

Ms. Taylor has been working on some of the administrative rules and mentioned that she and Ms. Hermanson have been in touch with the DPHHS lawyer concerning the rule requiring annual updating of the income limits. They were told that the annual income guidelines still must be updated every year, according to MCA 2-4-307, section 4. Discussion ensued on this annual updating of income guidelines and rule 4 under the MCA section says: "A rule originally adopting by reference any model code or rule provided for in subsection (1) may not adopt any later amendments or editions of the material adopted. Except as provided in subsection (6), each later amendment or edition may be adopted by reference only by following the rulemaking procedure required by this chapter."

The legislative update is that there are no changes in appropriation or resources for MTAP and the request for another MTAP position did not get approved. According to Chanda Hermanson (via a written report that Ms. Taylor read to the committee) – the vocational rehabilitation department got four rehabilitation technicians and provider rates were increased for Community Rehabilitation Providers, Pre-ETS providers, and Disability Determination Services physicians. The vocational rehabilitation department are mandated to perform a CSNA periodically to guide their practices and uncover unmet needs. They are gathering data and feedback through surveys and focus forums. This summer there will be focus forums held across the state. The first annual disability employment conference will be held in Butte on May 30th through June 1st. The Pre-Employment Transition Services are partnering with the Department of Military Affairs to conduct STEM Day camps for students with disabilities in Helena and Great Falls. The state rehabilitation council has some open positions to fill so if anyone is interested who are current/former VR clients or disability advocates, they're encouraged to apply. Contact Shawn Tulloch if anyone is interested in serving on this council.

Ms. Taylor added that there is a new DPHHS position – deputy administrator. This position will be Ms. Taylor's supervisor, instead of Ms. Hermanson. The person hired for this position is a current DPHHS DET Employee, Sarah Seltzer.

There have been some trainings that the staff participated in, such as on cognitive decline and collaborative safety training. There was also a Roberts Rules of Order training offered recently and extended to Governor’s committee members; Ms. Taylor mentioned she was unable to participate but Ms. Varnum and Lisa Cannon both attended. Ms. Taylor encouraged those who might be interested in the Roberts Rules of Order training to let her know and she will send a link to the training. The Deaf world training will be conducted during the August meeting with the Hamilton representatives.

Discussion ensued about scheduling a follow up strategic planning meeting and the regular committee meeting. It was determined that the strategic planning meeting will be held on August 15th in Helena and the committee meeting will be held on August 16th.

Budget Report: Hannah Stokes

Hannah Stokes opened with the state fiscal year 2023 budget totals for MTAP as of April 30, 2023.

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 April 30, 2023

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (68.79% of the \$882,488)	\$607,130
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$58,009
Prior year expense	(\$2,072)
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$663,067</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through April 30, 2023

Personal services (82.29% of \$264,000 PS projected budget)	\$217,284
Operational expenses (63.03% of \$618,488 OE projected budget)	<u>\$389,846</u>
Total expenses (68.79% of \$882,488 total HB2 budget)	\$607,130

Revenue collected as of April 30, 2023 - \$1,562,659

SFY 2023 actual expenses through April 30, 2023

Operating Expenses through April 30, 2023 - SFY 2023 \$255,936

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures \$128,041 (total relay budget \$228,398, remaining \$100,357)
- Outreach – total expenditures \$125,297 (total outreach budget \$180,000, remaining \$54,703)

- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$35,057 (total rent budget \$42,500, remaining \$7,443)
- Travel – total expenditures \$7,387 (total travel budget \$30,000, remaining \$22,613)
- Supplies – total expenditures \$1,476 (total supply budget \$6,367, remaining \$4,891)
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures \$46,444 (total equipment budget \$70,223, remaining \$23,779)
- Other Expenses/Equipment – total expenditures \$6,407 (total equipment budget \$10,000, remaining \$3,593)
- Communications – total expenditures \$4,734 (total communication budget, \$6,000, remaining \$1,266)
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures \$5,763 (total repairs/maintenance budget \$10,000, remaining \$4,237)
- Other services – total expenditures \$29,241 (total other services budget \$35,000, remaining \$5,759)

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2023 indirect costs are \$58,009
- 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 opened with the slide presentation of Montana Relay – going into answer performance for both traditional relay and CapTel relay. The Federal Communications Commission requires all calls be answered 85 percent within ten seconds or less. This has been successfully accomplished. For call volume, there are session and conversation minutes for people who use TTYs, speech to speech, voice carry over or hearing carry over services. Session minutes include both the start up and hang up of the call. This is for people who are not using Internet-based devices. For traditional relay there is a bigger gap between the session and conversation minutes compared to using a captioned phone. The session minutes include connecting and disconnecting and with traditional relay it takes more time to connect as the caller is letting the communication assistant know what phone number to call. For the caption telephone, it is not the same set up. Ms. Johnson said there has been a noticeable decline in call volume for caption telephone minutes because there is an increase in transitioning from analog lines to digital lines.

The traditional relay quality score for the most recent month is about 97 to 98 percent and the typing is an average of 78.6 words per minute with an accuracy average of 98 percent. For traditional relay customer care contacts, there were not many. Most of the contacts were wrong numbers and hang ups. Some inquiries for general information and none for equipment. For CapTel customer care, there were no interactions. Ms. Johnson also touched upon remote conference captioning (RCC) usage, monitoring it for any misuse and the minutes for RCC use which varies depending on the month.

Emilie Banasiak discussed outreach that Hamilton Relay will do in the coming months such as the Family Learning Weekend at Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) in June and the relay friendly webinar later in the same month.

MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Jeff Haley mentioned that he has done some outreach, such as in Polson, at the Boys and Girls Club which was a new event and focused primarily on younger people. He also had a table at the annual meeting for Blackfoot Communications in April. He expressed that he learned a lot from observing and listening to the meeting there. He was able to talk to quite a lot of senior citizens at this event. Mr. Haley had a table at the Missoula Home and Garden show and the women's fair in March and held an outreach event at a senior center in Eureka. Jeff mentioned he received a request from the sheriff's office in Lincoln County about conducting a test call with a TTY with their 911 service. Discussion ensued about real time texting (RTT). Mr. Haley will have a table set up at the first annual disability employment conference in Butte soon.

Mike Bouchard expanded on the question regarding the use of real time texting by mentioning that during the Montana Law Enforcement training that he does, one of the videos shows a demonstration comparing a traditional text call and an RTT call. The issue he has been seeing with the 911 centers is that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires RTT but not how to use it/install it. He says from experience, there's not a lot of push to use RTT as people are more familiar with regular texting (text to 911) and/or using video relay. Mr. Bouchard also added there's not a lot of requests for TTYs as well.

For outreach, Mr. Bouchard has done the home show in Billings which is a big event and had a table set up at the Three Rivers (telephone company) meeting. He will be attending the Mid-Rivers Telephone meeting later this summer. Mr. Bouchard had a table at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (not related to the Family Learning Weekend – separate event) to talk with staff and the kids. He attended a few senior coalition Zoom meetings, but those might be discontinued after July. For education, he took the Alzheimer's cognitive training online.

Mr. Bouchard demonstrated a landline Hearing Carry Over (HCO) phone with speakers and a tablet that can be used for a client who may not have Internet and has a speech difficulty but can hear over the telephone.

Unfinished business

It was decided that the Strategic Planning follow-up would be moved to August. A separate meeting will be held the day prior to the next MTAP Committee meeting.

New business

Election of new chair and vice chair – Ron Bibler nominated Lisa Cannon for chair, and she accepted. Cam Tulloch seconded. Motion has passed and Lisa Cannon is the new chair of the committee.

Ron Bibler nominated Tina Shorten for vice chair and she accepted. Lisa Cannon seconded. Motion has passed. Tina will continue as vice chair.

Next meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 16th, with the Strategic Planning meeting to be held the day prior, on Tuesday, August 15, 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.