

Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay Board Meeting

Opening:

The quarterly meeting of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay was called to order at *1pm on Thursday October 26th* of 2023 on Zoom platform and from TAM's office as a hybrid meeting.

Present:

GABTR Board Members:

Alfre Sonnenstrahl

Darrin Smith

David Drezner

Kenneth Putkovich

Michelle Morales

Glenn Lockhart

Lori Berrong

Payal Sharmacharya

Steve Cooper

TAM Staff:

David Bahar

Donna Broadway-Callaman

Leslie Hannibal

Kevin Steffy

Travis Dougherty

Brandie Callender

Hamilton Staff:

Melissa McMahon

Connor Fitzsimmons

JC Smith

Marcus Smith

Rebecca Miller

Interpreters:

Anna Rose

Anne Leahy

Gavin Baker

Erik Olson

Absent:

Alex Simmons
Allysa Dittmar
Deirdre Cheek Lynch Esq.

Approval of Agenda

Agenda for Quarterly GABTR meeting voted and approved.

Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes of October 26th Quarterly GABTR meeting reviewed and approved.

Director's Report by David Bahar:

- Informed about Leslie, the financial administrator, leaving for another position.
- Announced the ongoing search for Leslie's replacement at TAM.
- AI, the Chair, and Senior Call Check representatives were tasked to meet with their DoA Secretary.
- The meeting is scheduled for the first week of December, with outcomes to be communicated post-meeting.
- Budget Progress for FY 25:
 - The budget has been submitted to the governor's office for review.
 - The legislative review is pending, with progression updates expected over the month.
- Request for Proposals:
 - There is an active request for proposals for software replacement solutions.
 - The process is underway, with intentions to issue the request soon.

Maryland Relay's Report by Travis Dougherty:

- Expressed excitement and discussed usage, minutes, and stats regarding RCC (relay conference captioning).
- Noted past lack of restrictions on RCC led to unsatisfactory data.
- Discussed measures taken last October to reduce minutes, monitor protocols, and focus on marketing efforts with Devaney.
- Mentioned the creation of marketing assets and a social media push to recruit more RCC users, leading to recent growth.
- RCC Utilization:
 - The current RCC user base remains similar; consisting mainly of temple meetings, church services, and small non-profit organizations.
 - Emphasized the need to extend RCC benefits to a broader Deaf community for varied situational use.
- New Technologies and Services:

- RTT (real-time text) and UTAP (Universal Telecommunications Action Program) are being focused on for native delivery.
- Mentioned ongoing discussions with carriers for RTT integration and the addition of services like Hamilton and Sorenson VRS.
- Z Convo is being considered for a one-number capability.
- Weather and emergency alerts, including direct 9-1-1 access, are planned for future implementation, taking cues from Washington State's model.
- Professional Update: Travis was elected Chair of the National Association of State Relay Administrators (NASRA) for the 2024-25 term.
- AI Accessibility in Relay Services:
- SAFEAI, a working group, is examining AI accessibility and its policy implications for relay services.
- Question from Steve:
 - Steve inquired about RCC usage in the laryngectomy community and whether non-profit usage aligns with policy.
 - Travis clarified the policy, indicating a potential need for revision, and agreed that clarification is necessary.
- Concerns and Patterns:
 - Travis acknowledged seasonal trends in relay usage and addressed concerns over fluctuating numbers.
 - He reassured that while there are natural cycles, they are working on strategies to stabilize and increase usage.
- Guidelines and Federal Involvement:
 - Discussed the lack of clear guidelines affecting RCC services and the possible future role of the FCC.
 - The conversation with Sorenson highlighted a proactive approach to setting industry standards before FCC involvement.

Maryland Accessibility Technology's Report by Kevin Steffy:

- Last Quarter 24 Report:
 - Presented new applications for MAT services totaling 127 and equipment distributions of 337.
 - Compared to the previous quarter's 156 new applications and 227 distributions, indicating a significant workload.
- Equipment Distributions:
 - Noted a sharp increase in equipment distributions compared to FY 22-23.
- TTT Event for Deafblind/Low Vision:
 - Hosted a successful Talk, Text, and Train event with the National Federation of the Blind.
 - Highlighted the participation of five wireless mobile device companies and the devices they presented.
- Training and Device Familiarity:
 - Provided trainers with the opportunity to learn about various devices to better assist MAT customers.

- Distributed backpacks to trainers containing the devices for hands-on learning.
- Acknowledgments:
 - Thanked Jane, Brandie, and the committee for their contributions to the TTT event's success.
- MAT Online Applications:
 - Discussed the current inefficient system and ongoing talks with a vendor for a better solution.
 - Aimed to reduce staff efforts in document management and support environmental sustainability.
- Communication Facilitator Program:
 - Reported a significant increase in services provided to deafblind individuals for various needs.
 - Currently have 12 deafblind users in the program and are expecting more to join.

Outreach's Report by Donna Broadway:

- New Outreach Coordinators are actively engaging in relay partner trainings, community events, presentations, and field visits.
- Upcoming Events:
 - The March board meeting for federal retired employees is anticipated to be a significant event for MAT applications.
 - NFB Maryland event rescheduled to February due to the venue closing down.
 - Various presentations and trainings have been conducted, including those at hospitals and veteran events, alongside holiday networking events.
- Collaboration with MDOD and Department of Commerce on a new website is ongoing, with a tentative launch by the year's end.
- Special Email for TAM: Established a designated email (tam.outreach@maryland.gov) for RSVPs and special outreach projects.
- Outreach Efforts:
 - Continued efforts in advertising, webinars, mailings, and virtual as well as hybrid events to foster networking and new contacts.
 - Field visits, television ads, and paid segments are also part of the outreach strategy.

Business From the Previous Meeting:

- Discussion on Sponsorships and Financial Support:
 - Concerns raised about transparency in Maryland Relay's financial support to organizations like MDCC.
 - Clarification sought on the absence of such transactions in the financial report and the criteria for financial support.
- Senior Call Center Issue and ODHHS Participation:

- Questions on whether ODHH will assist state agencies with communication accessibility, especially regarding the Senior Call Center.
- Mention of ongoing issues with the Department of Aging avoiding discussions about making services accessible for Deaf individuals.
- Maryland Relay's Sponsorship Policies:
 - Explanation that Maryland Relay provides sponsorships in exchange for advertising opportunities, not direct financial donations.
 - Sponsorships are aligned with the organization's mission and offer a return, such as advertisement space or event speaking opportunities.
- Concerns on State Agency Sponsorships:
 - Caution advised on state agency sponsorships to avoid impropriety or the appearance thereof.
 - The need for careful consideration of sponsorships to ensure they are appropriate and align with the agency's role.
- Funding and Budget Clarifications:
 - Details on the funding sources for different initiatives, distinguishing between outreach and other budgetary allocations.
 - Acknowledgment of legal and procedural checks in place for approving sponsorship requests.
- Discussions on Legal and Inter-agency Dynamics:
 - Conversations with higher-level state officials regarding the urgency and legal implications of the Senior Call Check's inaccessibility.
 - Discussion on the need to approach inter-agency relationships diplomatically while advocating for accessibility and inclusivity.

New Business:

- The future of RCC
 - The discussion centered around the use of RCC (Relay Conference Captioning) and how current restrictions, like no use by for-profit organizations and in-person events, might have caused a decrease in usage minutes.
 - There was a suggestion that RCC could be utilized by Maryland state agencies to enhance accessibility for the citizenry, suggesting a possible revision to current protocols.
 - It was noted that outreach and marketing efforts should increase, particularly for communities that may not be fully aware of RCC, like late-deafened individuals.
 - The value of speech-to-speech services was highlighted, with personal experiences shared on its effectiveness for those with speech disabilities.
 - A suggestion was made to conduct a survey to gather board members' feedback on RCC guidelines and their impact on services provided, alongside a review of current laws and statutes.

Announcements:

No announcements at this time.

Adjournment:

The quarterly meeting of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay was adjourned at 11:32 pm by Al Sonnenstrahl

Minutes submitted by: Travis Dougherty

Minutes Draft approved by: Al Sonnenstrahl