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| **Meeting summary for MD AT Advisory Council Meeting (05/29/2025)** | |
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| **Attendees:**   |  | | --- | | Sarah Calhoun | | Chris Cawley | | Paige Bradford | | Joan Green | | Heather Ferguson | | Jhoselin Contreras | | Devra Brace | | Nora Walker | | Meghan Kramer | | Ian Edwards | | Betsy Hein | | Gabriel Rubinstein | | Kristen Patterson | | Kevin Cross | | Stephen Polacek | | Roscoe Brunson Jr | | James Whitney | | Virginia Bender | | Sama Bellomo | | Rebecca Shark | | Gabriel Rubinstein | | Alisa Chernack | | Betsy Hein | | Roscoe Brunson Jr | | Natalie Shearer (Lotus) ( Natalie Shearer ) |   **Quick recap**  The meeting covered various aspects of assistive technology, including presentations on innovative devices like the Lotus Ring and adaptive switch covers, updates on legislative developments affecting Maryland TAP, and discussions about financial loan programs and hearing assistive technology initiatives. Lori provided updates on TAP's expanded services, new funding opportunities, and website resources, while also introducing a pilot project for adapted vehicle donations. The conversation ended with plans for future collaborations and a request for Advisory Committee members to share their skills and connections to benefit TAP.  **Next steps**   * Sama to create and distribute a questionnaire for Council members to share more about themselves and their skills. * Lori to send out the revised slide deck to all Council members. * Council members to sign up for the MDTAP newsletter on the website for updates. * Council members to review the 2025 webinar schedule on the MDTAP website and provide feedback on desired training topics. * MDTAP team to implement the new interest-earning agreement with the State Employees Credit Union for the financial loan program. * MDTAP team to continue outreach and presentations on hearing assistive technology to meet grant goals. * Council members to share information about MDTAP's hearing assistive technology program with their broader communities. * MDTAP team to update their website as part of MDOD's website overhaul in 2025. * MDTAP team to draft regulations for the new state statute by October 1st. * MDTAP team to implement the adapted vehicle access pilot project.   **Summary**  **Lotus Ring Accessibility Presentation**  The meeting began with Lori welcoming attendees and requesting participants to introduce themselves in the chat. Natalie from Lotus presented the Lotus Ring, a wearable device that controls home objects using pointing gestures, emphasizing its accessibility features and the company's mission to optimize technology for people with disabilities. The presentation highlighted the ring's development, inspired by the founder's personal experience with limited mobility, and included user interviews to address various accessibility needs. Attendees were invited to ask questions and explore the device further.  **Ring Technology Demo**  Natalie presented a wearable ring and magnetic switch cover technology designed to help people with vision impairments control lights and other devices. She explained that the ring, which lasts 6 months on a single charge, can control up to three switch covers from up to 30 feet away using infrared technology, and demonstrated how it works with both rocker and toggle switches. The technology, which is waterproof to an IP7 rating, allows users to turn lights on and off without needing to see the switch, and can also be used to control TVs with a double click.  Natalie mentioned plans to expand to smart plugs, with current pricing at $349 for disability organizations.  **Assistive Tech and MDTAP Updates**  Lori announced that MDTAP has been formalized in state statute, allowing them to offer new billable services such as assistive technology assessments, customized training, and digital accessibility services starting October 1st, with regulations to be drafted this summer. The program aims to generate approximately $30,000 in revenue during its first year, and additional plans to offer CEUs for professional training in the future.  **Adapted Vehicle Donation Pilot Project**  Lori discussed a pilot project for providing adapted vehicles to individuals who are denied financial loans, noting that the program will sunset in 2028 without any attached funding. The program will act as a conduit between donors and recipients, with Lori emphasizing the need to identify available vehicles and ensure appropriate matching based on the vehicle's adaptability and the recipient's needs. Betsy and Sama raised questions about the donation process, with Sama explaining the typical steps involved in vehicle donations and suggesting ways to streamline the process. Lori mentioned using platforms like Facebook to market the program and encouraged the council to provide recommendations for connecting with dealerships and other organizations. Sama also raised concerns about the impact of loan denials on recipients' credit, suggesting a potential solution for addressing this issue.  **Maryland TAP Legislative and Funding Updates**  Lori discussed recent legislative developments at both state and federal levels affecting Maryland TAP. At the state level, new legislation creates an Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy, which will increase TAP's involvement in coordinating outreach to state agencies and ADA coordinators regarding assistive technology and worksite modifications. Federally, while TAP received its FY25 funding late, which will keep them operational through June 2026, the future of AT Act programs remains uncertain as they await a new budget proposal in June. To address sustainability concerns, Lori outlined several grant proposals being pursued, including one to Maryland Makerspace for expanding their 3D printing program, and partnerships with organizations like Next 50 for senior-focused assistive technology solutions. Sama suggested creating an external network of lay providers to handle equipment and services, which Lori acknowledged as a promising opportunity for future collaboration.  **Financial Loan Program Updates**  Lori explained the history and recent changes to the Financial Loan Program, which has been in operation since 1999. She described how the program works with banks, guaranteeing loans in exchange for interest revenue. Lori highlighted a new agreement with the State Employees Credit Union that allows the program to earn a portion of the interest on guaranteed loans, a change that went into effect on May 1st. This shift will generate a small revenue stream for the program, though interest rates were slightly increased to accommodate this change. Lori expressed excitement about this development, which was years in the making, and mentioned a recent meeting with the bank to discuss implementation details.  **Hearing Technology Program Expansion Update**  Lori presented an overview of their hearing assistive technology (HAT) program, highlighting a recent ACL grant of $700,000 that funded the expansion of their lending library and outreach efforts. She detailed their success in increasing HAT presentations, device demonstrations, and loans, while noting that while they met their goal of a 30% increase in demos and loans, they had not yet met their target for closed hearing aid loans. Lori also announced several new assistive technology devices added to their library, including communication devices, learning aids, and adaptive utensils, many of which were provided through vendor partnerships. Sarah encouraged the Council to share this information with their broader community for potential presentations and outreach opportunities.  **TAP Website and Updates Overview**  Lori presented updates on TAP's website resources, including the 2024 annual update, marketing materials, and the 2025 webinar schedule. She encouraged participants to sign up for newsletters and suggested future website updates. Sama announced plans to send a questionnaire to Advisory Committee members to better understand their skills and connections that could benefit TAP. Lori agreed to send out the revised slide deck and invited participants to follow up individually or connect for collaboration opportunities. | |
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