

RICAT Meeting Minutes: October 19, 2006

TechACCESS of Rhode Island, 110 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, RI 02888

2:30 – 4:00 p.m.

- **Attendance:**

Members: Florence Adeni-Awosika, John Benevides, Kerri Cicione, Margaret Dunning, Patricia Feeley, Margaret Hoye, Elisabeth Hubbard, Emily Lennon, Jeanne Panarace, Charles Pollock, Ying Sun, Jill Waller-Blaney, Kim Wennermark

ATAP Partner Agencies: Lezlee Shaffer, Judi Hammerlind-Carlson, Betsy Dalton

RI Department of Education: Phyllis Meloro-Lynch

Guest: Regina Connor

Office of Rehabilitation Services: Joe Murphy, Ron Racine

ATAP Program Coordinator: Dianne Newman

- **Welcome:** Chairperson Jeanne Panarace called the meeting to order at 2:40 p.m. She thanked TechACCESS for hosting the meeting and noted that a brief tour would be available later in the meeting. Jeanne noted the large attendance at the meeting, and asked everyone to introduce him/her self.

- **Acceptance of Minutes:** The Minutes of the RICAT Meeting of August 17, 2006 were accepted as submitted.

- **Chairperson's Report:** Jeanne Panarace

1. **Correspondence:** E-mail correspondence was received from RI Disability Vote Action regarding the November 7 election.

An Automark accessible voting machine has been placed at all polling places in Rhode Island. However, during the Primary Election, there were problems using the Automark due to a lack of training for poll workers, an unwillingness to turn the Automark on until a voter asked to use it, and long lines at some polling locations with no assistance offered to voters with disabilities and others who could not stand in line for long periods. A Petition was circulated asking the legislature to require that poll workers turn the Automark on in the morning and leave it connected all day. Voters should be aware that there is a hotline to the RI Disability Law Center that will be open throughout Election Day to resolve problems: 800 733-5332 or 401 831-3150.

An extended discussion took place about whether and what role RICAT should play in making voting more accessible. Some suggestions were:

- Sensitivity training for poll workers about people with disabilities

- Signs at polling places telling voters about the Automark and encouraging voters with disabilities to come to the front of the line
- Encouraging self-advocacy and /or providing self-advocacy training for voters with disabilities
- Recruiting volunteers to be trained on the Automark to serve as a resource on Election Day
- Advocating with the Legislature to make polling places more disability-friendly.

In addition to circulating the Disability Vote Action petition and encouraging RICAT members to use the Automark at their polling place, Jeanne suggested that the issue be turned over to the RICAT Legislative Committee for further discussion and to make recommendations back to the Council.

2. **Gift Presentation:** Jeanne welcomed Regina Connor as a guest at the meeting. On behalf of RICAT, Jeanne acknowledged Regina's recent retirement from ORS, and thanked her for her contributions to RICAT and to Rhode Islanders with disabilities. Jeanne presented Regina with a gift and a bouquet of flowers on behalf of RICAT.

- **Committee Reports:**

1. By-Laws Committee

At the June Council Meeting, we discussed making Partner Support a permanent RICAT committee instead of an ad hoc committee; this entails changing the RICAT Bylaws. Joe Murphy presented the By-Laws change to make the Partner Support Committee a permanent committee. Margaret Hoyer moved to accept the proposed By-Laws change; the motion was seconded by John Benevides, and passed unanimously.

2. Executive Committee

Jeanne reported that the Legislative Committee has not met recently because Bob Perrello's wife has been ill. Until Bob is able to resume his responsibilities as chair, Jeanne will convene the Legislative Committee.

The Executive Committee is developing a policy regarding guests at RICAT meetings; Jeanne will bring their recommendation to the Council at its next meeting.

Due to inconveniences with parking and walking, RICAT prefer meeting at Partner agency locations during winter months. PARI has agreed to host the November Council meeting. Meetings will be held at ORS in months when parking and walking are less problematic.

3. Membership Committee

Jill reported that Kevin Cronin recently received a community service award for developing an AT device. He is in a Rehab facility in Massachusetts.

Ed Zuromski has resigned from RICAT due to time constraints. RICAT is seeking 2 or 3 new members; the Committee has identified 4 potential members and will be conducting interviews with them. Jill noted that the term is three years, and that Council members are expected to attend 5 RICAT meetings per year and serve on at least one RICAT Committee.

There are 5 RICAT members whose terms will end in December: Emily, Pat, Jill, Ying, and Charlie. They are eligible to continue for another term, but must inform Jill or Jeanne of their interest. Charlie questioned whether his term would actually end this year, since he believed he had just begun a new term. Upon investigation, Jill determined that Charlie was correct; his term does not end this year.

In response to a question from Betsy, Jill noted that RICAT officer positions are for two-year terms and that none are ending this year.

4. Communications Committee

Joe Murphy distributed two handouts re: the redesign of the RICAT website. He asked RICAT members to provide bios and photos to be added to the website. The Committee plans to add a “counter” to track the number of visitors to the site and to add links to the ATAP Partners’ websites. Please e-mail links and comments about website content to Joe at josephm@ors.ri.gov. Our web master, Sharon DiPinto, will upload all changes and additions to the website.

To move the website revision process forward, Jeanne made a motion that the Council empower the Communications Committee to post the revisions to the website and to make decisions regarding the comments and suggestions of other Council members. The motion was seconded by Kim and passed unanimously. Charlie suggested that RICAT develop a print brochure, and offered to help by providing artwork and layout. After a brief discussion, it was decided that our first priority is the website, but that after the Communications Committee finishes working on the website, it would consider developing a new brochure.

• **ORS Report:**

1. Program Update:

Ron Racine reported that the search for an Assistant Administrator to replace Regina is underway, and that ORS expects the new person to be in place by January. Jeanne asked whether RICAT could participate in the interviewing process. Ron said it would not be feasible, but that anyone with suggestions could e-mail them to Ray Carroll or Steve Brunero.

2. Feasibility Study:

Dianne Newman distributed copies of the tabulation of results from the Feasibility Study. Over 350 Rhode Islanders with disabilities completed the questionnaire on

paper or over the Internet during May and June 2006. She reviewed the highlights of the study, and compared individuals who had interest in Alternative Financing loans with those who did not: they are heavier users of Assistive Technology and are more likely to have an unmet need for additional AT devices.

In response to a question from Patricia regarding the way in which participants were recruited for the Survey, Dianne listed some of the groups that supplied their mailing lists and noted that she had also visited several Senior Centers to collect data on-site. However, she agreed with Patricia's point that all respondents were people who were affiliated with some community resource or agency, and that they therefore did not represent people with disabilities who are outside the loop. This respondent bias could have affected the data and the conclusions, but given the time frame and budget for the study, Dianne felt that there were no reasonable alternatives to data collection.

Betsy suggested that Dianne send a copy of the Feasibility Study report to Bob Cooper, Director of the Governor's Council on Disabilities. She also noted that the purpose of the Study was to determine if there was a demand for alternative financing for AT in Rhode Island, and that now that the demand was measured, it was time to move ahead with the program.

- **Partner's Reports:**

1. TechACCESS---Judi Hammerlind-Carlson

Judi provided an overview, history and "virtual tour" of TechACCESS. The agency was co-founded by Judi and Betsy Dalton in the early 1990s. It offers services to individuals with a broad range of disabilities, and across all age groups. Equipment available for demonstration includes augmentative communication devices, devices for the hearing-impaired, blind and low-vision devices, cognitive and educational devices for students, adaptive toys, and a computer lab with hardware and software for alternative access. In addition to providing individual demonstrations, TechACCESS offers group experiences such as Cybervision Saturdays, Member Hours and After-School Tech Time, and serves as an AT Information Center.

2. Jeanne suggested that the ATAP Partner agencies prepare written updates for future the RICAT meetings.

The next RICAT meeting will be held on November 30 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at PARI. Jeanne Panarace adjourned the meeting at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
Dianne Z. Newman
ATAP Program Coordinator