

Vermont Telecommunications Relay Service
Advisory Council Meeting
Draft Meeting Minutes

Department of Public Service, GIGA Conference Room
112 State Street, Third Floor, Montpelier, Vermont
October 10th, 2023, 10:00a.m. to 12:00p.m.

Attendees:

Rene Pellerin, Consumer & Chairperson on VSTRS
Aaron Brassard, PSD Telecom (Acting Vice Chair)
Hunter Thompson, PSD Director Telecom/Connectivity Division (Appointed Vice Chair)
Michelle Vicino, Account Manager at T-Mobile for VT Relay Services
Christa Cervantes, Account Manager for Hamilton Relay (VT CapTel)
Pater Johnke, Deputy Director at VCIL and oversee EDP Program
Nick Morlan, VCIL
Laura Siegel, Director of Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind Services
Harlie Quero, PSD, Telecommunications Coordinator, (Notetaker)

Observers:

Amy Richardson, observers IRIS project
Andrew Brenaman, T Mobile Accessibility
Jamie IRIS Project
Paige King, IRIS Project

Interpreters:

Jennifer Raney, ASL
Ncole Comtois, ASL
Virginia Clark, ASL
Bobbi Cravier, ASL

Action Items (Also listed where relevant to specific Discussion):

Action Item	Person Responsible	Deadline
Corrections To Previous Minutes	Aaron Brassard	10/10/2023
Confirming Vice Chair	Aaron Brassard/Hunter Thompson	10/10/2023
Research on Upcoming Buildings	Hunter Thompson/Laura Siegel	10/10/2023
Update Data on EDP	Peter Johnke/Nick Morlan	1/10/2024
PSD investigate representing Vermont in NASRA	Hunter Thompson	1/10/2024

Meeting with E911 Board over cell phone GPS location	Laura Siegel/Hunter Thompson	N/A
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Corrections to Previous Minutes– Aaron Brassard

Discussion:

Corrections made to previous meeting minutes. Proposed corrections to meeting minutes were as follows. Michelle notes, ‘Sprint’ be corrected to ‘T-Mobile,’ Aaron accepts this correction. Laura Siegel notes, her last name and title be corrected, the proper spelling of her last name is ‘Siegel,’ and the correct title is, ‘Director of Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Blind Services at the Department of Disability Independent Living,’ Aaron accepts change.

Motion to accept the modifications and corrections to the above-mentioned changes, accepted by Aaron and Michelle.

Motion for approved minutes, granted.

Corrections To Previous Minutes	Aaron Brassard	10/10/2023
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Confirming Vice Chair-Aaron Brassard

Discussion:

Hunter Thompson to become Vice Chair, and Aaron Brassard, Interim Vice Chair, will step down. The Vice Chair position is appointed by the Commissioner, and previous incumbents of the Director of Telecommunications and Connectivity with the Public Service Department, have held the position of Vice Chair.

Aaron: “I believe the law says that the Vice Chair is designated by the Commissioner. I was the Interim Vice Chair, and I believe it is going to be Hunter. I feel that the position, should be and previously was held by the Director of Telecommunications and Connectivity. So, as the Interim Vice Chair, I will step down today, and I don’t know if this requires a vote. I believe he is appointed by the Commissioner. So after today, it will be him [Hunter Thompson].

Rene: “Okay, great. Hunter will represent the Department of Public Service. We will officially say, Hunter is the Vice Chair for the committee.”

Hunter Thompson as Vice Chair, accepted.

Questions:

No questions were raised for this agenda item.

Confirming Vice Chair	Aaron Brassard/Hunter Thompson	10/10/2023
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Research on Current and Upcoming Buildings – Hunter Thompson

Discussion

Determination of responsibility for accessibility equipment deployment in public buildings. Clarification on if Buildings and General Services, BGS, or VCIL, hold responsibility for disturbing and installing hardware for public usage in public buildings. PSD has found that no change has been made to public phone access.

Questions/Commentary:

Aaron: “I believe you raised this question in the previous meeting.” Context, Laura raised a question on the discussion point above previous meeting, responsibility for equipment deployment in public buildings.”

Rene: “This is not Relay Services Committee’s responsibility. It is BGS’s responsibility.”

Laura: “That’s right. It is BGS responsibility, and as of right now, nothing has happened, that I know of.”

Aaron: “Hunter has done some research and does have information on that.”

Laura: “Why don’t we let Hunter share on the areas they might not have Vermont CapTel or Accessible phones.”

Hunter: “I was unable to get a complete list from BGS that provided me with anything that would imply there are open state buildings for camera usage for the general public.”

Rene: “Technology has changed. We don’t see payphones anymore. The majority of people do have cell phones today and use texting as a way of communicating. There is other technology in other office buildings. There are several different options for accessibility.”

Peter: “Just a comment, I think it has been at least a year, maybe a couple of years, the DMV, [Department of Motor Vehicles], put in specific communication devices but the feedback I’ve gotten from the public, is that either they’re not working, or the staff does not know how to set them up. So, there is a lack of training, but I don’t know of any other people have other feedback on that.”

Laura: “The DMV has announced the purchase of 14 UbiDuos, which contradicts the success of those. There is a need to figure out how to work together and share with the DMV the feedback that is being received. Hopefully, that will help them improve.”

Research on Upcoming Buildings	Hunter Thompson/Laura Siegel	10/10/2023
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Contacting VCIL for Hardware – Peter Johnke and Nick Morlan

Discussion:

Overview on how individuals acquire equipment and how to contact VCIL for assistance with the Vermont Equivalent Distribution Program, [EDP]. The steps include, VCIL determining when an individual applies through the EDP, if they meet certain criteria, including physical needs and accommodations for phone services, which vendors have the equipment available. No mention of installation. Discussion proposed by Laura, on if the EDP is tracking equipment distribution numbers, and where that information can be found so gaps in equipment distribution can be found.

Questions/Commentary:

Q:

Rene: “Will [VCIL], provide technical assistance on equipment? I think there are a number of ways that people can get information, and there are different ways people can get equipment. My personal opinion about this, is that we use relay services. Is that an acceptable way of gaining access to the videophone and relay?”

A:

Nick: “I can speak to how receiving equipment would work if people are applying through the Vermont EDP fund. You are correct, there are different ways of getting different types of equipment. People would be contacting us if they were specifically looking for telephones, cell phones, those type of things, and if they are able to get one in another way, and if they call under the EDP criteria, such as deaf, deaf and blind. They would apply for the EDP, we go through a checklist of what their needs are, whether it might be visual, hearing, do they have difficulties in holding a phone, do they have perhaps, a brain injury, or something like that, which they need a different type of phone. All of this is physical equipment. The way that VCIL gets them the equipment for consumers varies. We do research whether it is Amazon Prime, Best Buy, or other vendors to get them the equipment. Peter has mentioned, we worked with Vermont Assistive Technology and work closely with Tracy Rew. That’s a brief overview.”

Q:

Laura: “Since I have been attending these meetings, I’ve noticed something, and please correct me if I am incorrect. I notice that Michelle tends to present updates and statistics and so forth. Hamilton Relay also provides updates. I’m not seeing any updated data from EDP. My understanding is that Vermont’s universal fund is used to support that, so I would like to see some more data or statistics on that program monthly. It would be really nice to see those stats.

A:

Peter: “I can address a little bit of that. We do submit a report. It is a text report because there is not a lot of quantity. I felt it didn’t make sense to present something in a PowerPoint form that works better with Michelle. Maybe Hamilton, when you have a high volume of activity, and when Nick gets to his report, we will be able to talk a little bit about some of the things we have been doing to increase outreach. But we have been setting up some reports every time we’ve had these meetings. I don’t know if you just have not gotten them, or you did not recognize them because it is in text format.”

Q:

Laura: “Yeah, just has part of my job, I just want to make sure that we are not overlooking anything. Advertising on that is part of my job so it’s just hard to say if there are gaps if I’m not seeing that data to help figure out where those gaps may be occurring.”

A:

Nick: “I want to add that I have been doing the reports, after Peter has been doing the reports. I am certainly open if the council would like it would better to accompany the report, that is either a spreadsheet or tally up things on a calendar year basis to be able to look to see overtime. I am interested in the information, as I am a hard-of-hearing consumer as well. My hope is to only increase those numbers. I will bring this up in our report. We recently had a new advertisement that we are excited about. We may be getting an increase in requests; my hope is that it is only going to improve and get more in demand. However, I am more than happy to get feedback on how we can best present those numbers.”

Laura: “Great thank you.”

Updated Data on EDP	Peter Johnke/Nick Morlan	1/10/2024
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T-Mobile Report – Michelle Vinico

Discussion:

Since April, Social media outreach on relay conference captioning to increase engagement. Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are being used currently. Sounds for Sounds, National Association of Social Workers conference, and possibly Vermont Maternity Expo, are some of the outreach efforts Michelle is getting behind.

Increased, social media outreach on speech services, and deaf blind. Michelle finds that most people are on social. Websites relay the same info, and social media changes day to day. Most focuses are on social media as a result. Upcoming Outreach, Songs for Sounds. Been doing RCC presentation, talked with Higher Ability, and Laura. Upcoming for T-Mobile, going to a conference in Burlington in November for National Association of Social workers. Michelle mentioned the Vermont Maternity Expo in January but has to determine if that will be of interest and time for T-Mobile.

However, upcoming events include Songs for Sounds. Songs for Sounds, partnered with them, is touring the United States, and will be in Vermont October 26th and 27th.

This organization provides free hearing training, targeted towards people who may not be aware they lost their hearing. Songs for Sounds will be going to Veterans Associations and hospitals, Oct 26th and 27, and Michelle will be right there when the truck arrives, acting as a resource for Vermonters that may have lost their hearing and need assistance. Once details of this event are finalized, Michelle will share.

As far as the TRS minutes, minutes from July 2021 they fell down, and August 2022 numbers are higher than these years. Many people are moving away from the TRS system, to webcams, and other internet phones. This will allow them to use mobile devices, such as iPads, allowing them to leave home and be more involved locally. Moving away from traditional, stationary services.

RCC Billable Minutes, from July 2021 to present has slowed, as two years ago they reached their cap. Slowly limited outreach. Now, looking to increase those numbers again. They are hoping with the road tour, Songs for Sounds, will increase the number of participants and RCC usage.

Michelle went through the breakdown of call types. TYY being the most popular service by more than half. There is a noticeable increase in Voice Carryover calls, VCO in April, but any slight change is easily noticed as much of the calls are still TYY.

The Vermont Relay Website information remains the same, unless new services are added, or service customizations are added. There was a spike in website activity, as their website was getting redesigned and updated. There was a boost on social media as well at this time.

Questions/Commentary:

Q:

Laura; “I know RTT is a part of replacing TTY. Will this have a direct impact on the numbers?”

A:

Michelle: “I honestly cannot answer that. Andrew, do you see that happening?”

Andrew: “No, not yet. It is really just the beginning at this point. We haven’t seen that change or impact.”

Q:

Nick: “Thank you, my question was going to be, at VCIL, I've been working with a number of people who are hard of hearing or visually impaired or completely blind, or deaf who are homeless or who may have been displaced either by the flood we had or they might be living temporarily with family or friends and they don't have access to a phone or perhaps if they had access to a phone, it is not theirs, they might not have permission to use the Internet on a -- at a person's house. I'm just curious what kind of outreach is available for people who do not have the kind of access that many of us do? How do we connect with these folks?”

A:

Michelle: “For the Songs for Sounds service, I can let you know where they are going, so you can tell your customers, they can go there if they'd like.”

Nick: “Yeah, that would be fantastic. I would appreciate that information. Thanks.”

Q:

Rene: “I have a question for PSD. Aaron, are one of you representing Vermont on that National Association for State Directors and Relay service?” It shall be noted, Rene Pellerin is a member of the FCC representing the American Deaf Blind Association, which focuses on expanding telecommunications services for individuals with multiple disabilities.

Aaron: “I don't believe I have been apart of any meetings for that. I have seen some invites. I am not certain. I would say actively no, we are not doing that. We can certainly look into it, though.”

Rene: “I think it is a very important group for you all to be involved with. Of all the state who have relay services, they get together and talk about perhaps their waivers for state relay, because there are some relay services, IP platforms, those are not accessible to TTY. Of course, they're not used much anymore, but I think that is a very hot topic, because there are some TTY users still out there. And so, the FCC is responsible for populating new regulations about what states are doing around relay services. I think that is a really important group to monitor and be involved in.”

Aaron: “Thank you, Rene.”

Rene: “Certainly.”

Hamilton Report– Christa Cervantes

Discussion summary

Number of calls have gone up from February to August. Hamilton is unsure of what may of caused the increase. There does seem to be a gradual increase in those services. Hamilton announces a scholarship for high schoolers. The award will be given out to one person per state that provides relay services and is for students that are going onto secondary education. The promotion has not begun for this scholarship, but information will be made available in November 2023. Information about nominating individuals will be made available in November on their website.

Questions/Commentary:

Q:

Nick “Thank you for the information. I don’t know if [increase from February to August], would have anything to do with the July 2023 flood. Did you notice an increase around then?”

A:

Christa: “There was a bit of an increase, but it has continued to go through August and September. It could have something to do with that. Very much so.”

Nick: “I was just curious about that because even though the flood happened in July, there are people who are needing to contact FEMA. Probably, will need to do that for some and the hope is that more people, as we introduce them to captioned phones that those minutes will increase as well. Thank you.”

Christa: “It is very possible that had something to do with the floods.”

EDP Report– Nick Morlan

Discussion Summary:

Report from Quarter 2 April 1st through June 30th, and Quarter 3, July 1st through September 30th is being discussed. VCIL building is closed due to the July flood, but applicants are still being contacted regardless of an application with a ‘hold’ status. Funding for the EDP almost never gets used, so there are efforts to expand outreach beyond the deaf and hard of hearing communities. Application requirements around income guidelines, should be reexamined. Lastly, VCIL will seriously consider electronic documents and applications.

Quarter 2, EDP received five applications, which was comparable to the first quarter. Four of them were funded for equipment. There has been some difficulty sorting out which equipment they need. When an applicant works with a peer advocate, the process is easier and helpful to VCIL. Sometimes when an individual is applying by themselves, there may be difficulty in finding out the exact equipment they will need.

Continued partnership with the Vermont Assistant Technology Project, which helps people select equipment that would be best for their individual needs.

In April, VCIL did a tabling event and are always looking for more promotional opportunities. Quarter 3, four applications were received. During this quarter, the flood happened and the VCIL building was flooded and currently closed. That being said, VCIL has made sure to maintain contact with the applicants, if their application has not been completed or is on hold, they never stop contact. VCIL is looking for a temporary office at this time. Due to the flood, no in-person outreach efforts are underway, but there are some events in November. Peter will be attending the TBI conference and will be at the Health Equity Summit in Burlington.

Questions/Commentary:

Q:

Laura: “I am curious about EDP. How much funding is currently available?”

A:

Peter: “I don’t have the number off the top of my head, but it is typically a two-year grant. One of those reasons is different outreach programs, we never use all of the funding in any given year. We always have

money left over. It's rare for any program, typically, there is not enough funding through the time period for grants. We are always trying to seek out other ways to reach people."

Q:

Laura: "Often, I share information about the EDP, and I'm wondering, how I might do that better, and how it might do better. Could it be available to people who can hear, but have communication challenges?"

A:

Nick: "I can expand on that. We are trying to make sure that people understand because I think, in the beginning, people thought that this was only for deaf and hard of hearing. We are trying to expand. There are some people that we've been working with who have other needs. For instance, I was working with a university professor, who is neither deaf or hard of hearing but has a rare condition that they have lost their speaking voice. We're trying to get more outreach out there, but I also feel that there is still a lot that we need to do to expand this information to deaf, hard of hearing, deaf blind, as they are responsible for over half of the outreach to the deaf community and hard of hearing community. As Peter said there is a substantial amount of money, people can get up to \$750 in equipment every four years, correct, Peter? So, when people are usually surprised when they hear that there is that much money, as Peter said all of our funding runs out pretty quickly. In my time, my hope is that we will just see those numbers grow. I do very much want to work with all of these partners to get the word out there. I am more than happy to do that outside of this meeting as well."

Peter: "I just wanted a quick note on that. The application is available on our website so that is one way to access it. We can either send them by mail or email them to individuals."

Q:

Laura: "I was just wondering, if it would be helpful to create an electronic form as another option?"

A:

Nick: "I have been talking a little bit to Tracy Rew just how we can make all of our forms and documents more accessible. I work with my other colleagues who are blind or deaf or other things to make sure there is a way that we can approve on that. Definitely would love all feedback on people who are finding the process difficult. I do hear from some people; we do have peer advocates who can help from -- the idea is that it will become accessible. Thanks for bringing that up."

Q:

Rene: "The law requires you to submit an application. I would really like to see the salary part removed from that. That qualification very few states require the income guidelines. If we can advocate to change that policy to remove the salary, I think we might see an increase in these applications."

A:

Nick: "I agree 100% on that. I tell people to not see the income guidelines as whether or not they apply because one good thing that the not running out of money is that if somebody is over income right now, we hold on to their application and tell them that we will put them on a waiting list and Peter, you can correct me on this, but it is my understanding that we have funded people who were over income because everybody else had been funded. Those applicants all

have been able to get equipment because there was still money left over. I agree that from a public standpoint I would love to see that advocated as not being something that would stop somebody from applying. It is very important.”

Peter: “Nick is correct about the process.”

Direct Video Calling – Aaron Brassard/Laura Siegel

Discussion

Description of DVC and any limitation with the technology. Exact location has not been made yet, as 911 cell phone calls are tracked by triangulation between local cell phone towers. Peter brings up a concern over Internet-Based phone systems registered with a home address, if a person leaves the address listed on the registration, then the emergency responders would not be able to locate the individual's proper location, as the phone will give the registered address as the location of the emergency.

Aaron: “This was an item that came up outside of the last meeting, but I wanted to put it on the agenda, so we can discuss it, and does it apply.”

Q:

Laura: “This is something that happened a while ago. How to do with communications services equivalent for the deaf. It is important that a deaf person, they are using a phone where they can't be located, by where they are calling from. It has something to do with addressing that or solving that issue, so that if a deaf person was using the phone, they can be located. My understanding is if you are using your cell phone to call 911, it would pin the location of where you might be. It might not be the exact, that is a problem is that it is not finding the exact location. However, there was some controversy with the FCC. Does anyone know anything more about this?”

A:

Michelle: “My understanding, if they use a wireless device, it uses the GPS and they [emergency responders/services] can track them down within 25 meters. However, if you are in a building, they cannot see what floor you are on.”

Major Concerns to Consider with Direct Video Calling:

Michelle: “They don't have the perfect precision for an exact location yet. How can this be resolved; how can this increase knowledge for the deaf community?”

Peter: “Another issue that comes up, there are a lot of businesses now in different places that use the Internet-based phone systems, in the system you have to plug in where that is physically located so if you call 911, that is the address that comes up because you can pick up that phone and take it anywhere else and plug it in and do it somewhere else, if you don't go in and change the address, if I was using that device and I had 911, they wouldn't find me. Just something to be aware of with that kind of situation as well.

Nick: "As a former firefighter, I have always been interested in how somebody would get assistance, perhaps maybe a good use of the fund somebody would be able to get a phone but perhaps had a preset message describing who they are, where they live, things like that. I know Apple technology, this is with the more expensive iPhones, but there is something where if the phone is bumped or thrown in a car accident and then the emergency thing goes off. The technology is starting to work but it definitely needs to work for everybody."

Rene: "Using the RS services does require access to 911, it identifies where you are. The FCC had required that. But with cell phones again, it does not really pinpoint an exact location. We can spread that knowledge to the deaf community as well as a whole. We've had a meeting in the past to discuss how to reach out to 911 on cell phone. Maybe we could follow up on that and try again and get some updated information."

Rene encouraged Laura to have a meeting with the e911 board to get an update on cell phone location services.

Meeting with E911 Board over cell phone GPS location	Laura Siegel/Hunter Thompson	N/A
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Other concerns brought up:

Press Conferences - Nick brought up the point that at the State of Vermont's Governor's press conferences during the flooding in July, no ASL interpreters were available, and the captioning was incorrect. Rene encouraged Nick to reach out to the FCC and WCAX directly over these concerns. It is important that the deaf and hard of hearing community to not be left out on important news, as Rene said "I knew nothing about it, there is nothing on the news. No access to information. The FCC contacted WCAX. They said Well, Rene lives up the hill so he shouldn't have to worry about it."

Meeting conclusion

Rene: Has anything been set up for the next meeting?

Aaron: "We do not have any set, we can reset every 10th of the month, I will be sure to get the meeting invites out to placeholders that sounds great. I think we are good. We had a lot of good discussion today."

Rene: "We need to try and focus on issues that relate to the relay service. A couple of things that are not quite pertaining to the relay service."

Motion to adjourn meeting proposed by Rene. Nick makes motion, and Aaron seconded motion.

Meeting adjourned.

Scheduling for 2024 Meeting:

January 10th, 2024 (Confirmed)

April 10th, 2024 (tentative)
July 10th, 2024 (tentative)
October 9th, 2024 (tentative)