



*Providing Technical Assistance to Assistive Technology Act Entities*

## **SMALL INVESTMENTS – BIG SAVINGS:**

A look at how vocational rehabilitation agencies save money by partnering with their statewide AT program

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The RESNA Catalyst Project provides technical assistance to Statewide Assistive Technology Programs, Alternative Financing and Access to Telework Programs, and Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology programs. RESNA, the Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Society of North America, is the premier professional organization dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of people with disabilities through increasing access to technology solutions.

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## Introduction

Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (VR) are finding that working with their Assistive Technology Act Programs (Statewide AT Programs) can save the agencies funds. Statewide AT Program services **are meant to supplement, not supplant VR services**. This is why several VR agencies have contracted with their Statewide AT Programs to provide cost effective services that save VR funds.

There are four services provided by statewide AT programs that VR agencies use most frequently that have resulted in cost saving to the agencies:

- **Try Before You Buy Services -Device Demonstrations.** Statewide AT Programs offer device demonstration services so that an individual with a disability can compare several devices to find the device just right for the individual.
- **Try Before You Buy Services -Device Loans.** Statewide AT Programs also provide device lending libraries so that an individual can borrow devices and try them in their work and home environments, to see if they really are the right fit for the job.
- **Distance Device Training.** Statewide AT Programs have trainers that can show how a device can be used and how to operate the features of a particular device. As the Statewide AT Program covers the entire state, often the program used distance technologies to reach individuals in remote areas.
- **Distance Device Consultations.** Statewide AT Programs use distance technologies to answer questions about specific devices. The technologies allow them to respond to questions in a timely manner.

The remainder of this document contains four case studies from Assistive Technology of Alaska, the Connecticut Tech Act Project, New Jersey's Advancing Opportunities Assistive Technology Center, and Nebraska's Assistive Technology Partnership that describe how their Vocational Rehabilitation agencies (VR) have realized savings by partnering with each Statewide AT Program.

## CASE STUDY ONE

### **Remote AT Training and Consultation Services: Assistive Technology of Alaska's "TeleAT" Saves Money for Alaska's State Vocational Rehab Agency**

Mystie Rail, Executive Director with Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA), knows that getting around the state is no easy task. Alaska is 586,412 square miles, and the largest state; two and a half times larger than Texas. Mystie states, "Because of the far distances between us in Anchorage and the clients that are scattered throughout the state, often times the only way we get to a client is by flying. Providing one hour of on-site support for one client in a remote Alaskan village could potentially take an AT specialist one to two days depending on where the client is located in the state. The bottom line is that flying and the time needed to provide on-site support is costly to us and to VR who funds us."

About four years ago, Mystie found a way to mitigate long distance travel and the high costs accrued in doing so by developing "TeleAT" services, distance training and consultation services using a remote software solution called Bomgar. Mystie says "We did a lot of research to find the right remote software solution. In the end, we found that the Bomgar software provides us with remote access to the client. It lets the client watch our screen, which is wonderful for training sessions. It also allows us to do file transfers, which save many on-site support hours when a missing update is all that is needed and live chat. I can even "push" a URL, which will automatically open a browser for the client. Either user can also enable a privacy screen at any point during the session. We think the cost for the software is reasonable too. The initial start up cost was \$3,063 for the software, and \$600 per year after that."

ATLA uses the software to interact with clients remotely in several ways. Mystie states, "We may use the system during the intake process to gather initial information about a client's current computer specifications. This is often also done after our initial assessment to determine if their current computer will work with the software we are recommending. We also use the system during the training process, but most often we use it for quick fixes or to visually "demonstrate" how to do something with an AT device that someone may have forgotten or needs assistance troubleshooting."

Perhaps the most attractive part for ATLA as it developed TeleAT services was the fact that it has saved Alaska's VR close to \$53,000 over the last four years. Mystie says, "We were able to illustrate the \$53,000 cost savings to VR by comparing the cost of using Bomgar for trainings vs. the cost of travel to see a client in person. If we did a Bomgar support session with someone in Juneau, I took the portion of the cost that VR would have had to pay for an AT specialist to travel on-site to provide the same service. We have increased the awareness of VR staff to TeleAT through training and presentations on the remote training software system."

## Calculating the Savings

Year	# of Clients Trained	Cost for On-site Training	Cost for Distance Training (Bomgar)	Savings to VR Using Distance Training
Year One	6	\$5,500	\$3,063	\$2,437
Year Two	9	\$9,000	\$600	\$8,400
Year Three	18	\$18,000	\$600	\$17,400
Year Four	25	\$25,000	\$600	\$24,400
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>\$57,500</b>	<b>\$5,463</b>	<b>\$52,637</b>

To learn more about ATLA's remote service for AT to save costs for its VR, contact:  
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Anchorage, AK 99503, PHONE/TTY: 800.478.2815, 907.563.2599, e-mail: [Mystie@atlaak.org](mailto:Mystie@atlaak.org) ,  
Skype: m.rail , website: <http://labor.state.ak.us/dvr/at-prog.htm>

To view the contract between ATLA and Alaska's Vocational Rehabilitation Agency online, visit  
<http://www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/crps-resources.htm>.

## **CASE STUDY TWO**

### **“Try before You Buy” Device Loan Program: Connecticut Tech Act Project’s Saves Money for Connecticut’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services**

Connecticut’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the state's vocational rehabilitation agency, is the lead agency for the Connecticut Tech Act Project (CTTAP). Arlene Lugo, CTTAP’s Program Director, acts as the Assistive Technology Consultant to BRS staff.

Arlene explains that, “In 2010, BRS contracted with CTTAP to provide a Device Loan Program specifically for BRS consumers. At that time, BRS used American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to purchase an initial inventory of AT devices under "Services to Groups," with the understanding that CTTAP would operate a pilot AT Device Loan Program for BRS Consumers.”

Since 2010, the BRS Device Loan Program has provided BRS consumer’s access to AT devices during on-the-job training, work evaluations, working interviews, or when employed in order to:

- give the consumer the opportunity to try out the device in an employment setting to determine if it is the right device prior to purchasing;
- give the consumer access to the device while the employer or BRS purchases and obtains the device for the consumer; and
- increase the opportunity for the consumer’s successful employment outcome.

The BRS AT Device Loan Program is designed to allow the consumer, employer, and BRS counselor an opportunity to explore reasonable accommodations in the work place for the employee, as well as to maximize the benefits of determining the most appropriate AT device for the consumer. Arlene states, “Often when a consumer comes in with an idea of an AT device he or she believes is needed, the person is able to make a more informed decision after trying several devices. After the appropriate device is identified, the device loan allows the consumer to continue to work successfully with a loaned AT device while waiting to receive his/her new device from the employer or BRS.”

#### **Cost Savings**

The device lending program saves money for BRS by giving the consumer the opportunity to try out AT before BRS purchases it for the consumer. The pilot program has served 39 individuals in its 2 1/2 years of operation. Twenty-one of the clients (54%) found the loaned device met their needs, and only then did BRS proceed to purchase the device, or negotiate with the employer to provide the device. However, 14 individuals decided the device would not meet their needs. Approximately 29% of those individuals then went on to try other devices until they found devices that matched their needs. Arlene explains, "Deciding against an AT device might at first come across as an unsuccessful outcome for all parties involved. However, it

allowed us to explore other devices until the best AT was identified for the consumer. Ultimately, the cost of purchasing the wrong AT for the consumer is avoided for BRS. For example, one client thought a digital hand-held magnifier (a \$980 device) would work for him as he completed his internship and for eventual employment working at a hospital. He was most concerned about doing rounds and having to read patient charts, as he required magnification. He also requested a Nook eBook reader (a \$200 device) to carry electronic textbooks and notes. He found upon trial that the more expensive hand-held magnifier did not meet his needs. It was determined that the level of magnification provided by an iPad (\$600 device) and app, along with the ability to carry electronic textbooks, notes, and more in one device worked better. This more appropriate device was purchased, saving BRS \$580. In total, the cost savings to BRS for not purchasing devices until consumers tried them through the device loan program was approximately \$5907 over the 2 1/2 year pilot program.”

An additional unexpected benefit of the program is that BRS employees are also able to borrow AT devices, which allows the VR Counselors to speak to the consumer about the devices with more knowledge and experience.

**Try Before You Buy Cost Savings Data**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b># Clients</b>	<b>AT Met Client’s Need</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>AT Did Not Meet Client’s Need</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Client Tried Different AT</b>	<b>Cost Savings</b>
2012	16	7	44%	4	25%	2	\$2429
2011	15	11	73%	5	33%	1	\$2979
2010	8	3	37%	5	62%	1	\$499
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>\$5907*</b>

***\*Includes cost savings on devices that consumers felt would meet their needs, but were purchased by the employer or consumer.***

To learn more about CTTAP and their Device Loan Program for their vocational rehabilitation agency, contact: Arlene Lugo, Program Director, Connecticut Tech Act Project (CTTAP), Bureau

of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106, PHONE: (860) 424-4881; TTY: (860) 424-4839; e-mail: [arlene.lugo@ct.gov](mailto:arlene.lugo@ct.gov) , website: [www.CTTechAct.com](http://www.CTTechAct.com).



## CASE STUDY THREE

### **Making Opportunities Happen: New Jersey's Advancing Opportunities helps their Department of Labor and Workforce Development avoid waste**

Since 2008, Advancing Opportunities and New Jersey's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) have had an ongoing partnership in meeting the assistive technology needs for consumers and counselors. The partnership is based on a contract, which is funded through New Jersey's Innovation and Expansion Program that is part of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Through a competitive process, funds have been awarded to Advancing Opportunities by VR to develop and implement innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.

This year, Advancing Opportunities has identified three needed goal areas outlined in their contract that include a "Project Activity Plan", which illustrates in detail how deliverables relate to each goal, objective, and timeline (see Appendix). These goal areas are:

- **Technology Lending Center:** Equipment loans to DVR clients so that trials can be done before purchases are made. These device trials have helped ensure that appropriate equipment is being purchased for clients, thus saving money for VR.
- **Consideration of AT by DVRS Counselors:** DVR counselors need hands-on learning with assistive technology in order to consider which clients are more likely to benefit from it.
- **Organization and Personal Productivity for Counselors:** With the increasing availability of electronic tools to help us do our jobs, DVR counselors need support in learning to use these tools so that they can maximize their efficiency.

#### **Avoiding Waste through Opportunities**

Fred Tchang, Director of Assistive Technology Services for Advancing Opportunities, talks about how Advancing Opportunities works with New Jersey's Vocational Rehabilitation to create good assistive technology decisions for the consumer, and ultimately costs saving to their vocational rehabilitation. Fred explains, "Assessing what assistive technology the consumer needs in order to be productive in the work place is an essential step to narrowing down effective job accommodations for the consumer. However, device trails for a period of time after an assessment are really the only way to know for sure that the assistive technology will be used to support the consumer in the right way on the job. By performing these assistive technology assessments and trails through our contract with VR, and in the consumer's own work place, we are doing two things. First, we are helping the consumer find the right assistive technology to make her or him more independent and productive in the work place, and second, we are helping VR to save money by not purchasing a device that ultimately does not support or work well for the consumer. As such, only assistive technology that has been tried in the real world by each consumer and proven to work the right way on the job is purchased."

To learn more about Advancing Opportunities and their contractual agreement with their vocational rehabilitation agency, contact: Fred Tchang, Director of Assistive Technology Services, 1005 Whitehead Road Extension, Suite 1, Ewing, New Jersey 08638.  
PHONE: 888-322-1918, TTY: 609-882-4182, email: [FTchang@advopps.org](mailto:FTchang@advopps.org) , website: <http://www.assistivetechologycenter.org/>

## **CASE STUDY FOUR**

### **SOLUTIONS ON SITE: A model program and partnership between Nebraska's Assistive Technology Partnership and Nebraska's Vocational Rehabilitation**

What if all federal funds that go for Assistive Technology programs were discontinued? Although unlikely, this scenario was one of the motivating factors that led Nebraska's Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) to propose new ways of collaborating and working with their state Vocational Rehabilitation agency (VR). Partnering allowed VR to obtain the technology expertise of ATP and enhance the likelihood of successful employment outcomes through the identification of appropriate AT solutions. Key to the development of the partnership were several champions (the former Director and Assistant Director of VR) within VR who were instrumental in working with the ATP Director with a common goal of developing onsite assessment services. The partnership has led to a program called SOLUTIONS ON SITE, which boasts successful AT outcomes for people with disabilities in the VR system, while at the same time sustaining NE's ATP longevity by leveraging additional funds, and becoming a large scale provider of direct AT services statewide.

SOLUTIONS ON SITE considers itself a part of NE's VR (most AT centers are located right in a VR). There is no formal contract between the two agencies, only an MOU that is accompanied by an abstract and an annual report. For 2013, ATP is projecting that the SOLUTIONS ON SITE program will receive close to \$500,000 to continue to increase the utilization of AT services within the VR system.

#### **Activities**

SOLUTIONS ON SITE provides many activities as part of their VR MOU, which includes the following:

- Increase participants' knowledge, skills, and competencies in the area of AT.
- Provide AT device demonstrations and loans statewide to support the decision-making process and timely access to needed equipment.
- Provide public awareness activities that are broad based initiatives designed to reach large numbers of individuals that increase awareness of AT. This includes providing updates to VR staff scheduled with all VR Offices.
- Provide videos and photos to VR staff, and techniques for their use on the iPad in order for VR staff to be able to share with consumers, employers, and professionals out in the field.

- Maintain and promote an AT loan pool, which includes the listing of AT items on the AT4ALL website. Equipment identified by ATP field staff is purchased throughout the year for demonstrations and loans.

### **COST SAVINGS**

When asked about how SOLUTIONS ON SITE saves money for their state's VR, Director Leslie Novacek for ATP states, "I believe we show a cost savings for VR in many ways. VR themselves has estimated a value of \$1.2 million of ATP services from the \$500k funded! Through our MOU, VR has the opportunity to utilize all of our services, plus additional ones that we have developed exclusively for the SOLUTIONS ON SITE program. One service is the funding coordination process, which includes a number of VR clients that are referred to other resources, and we leverage dollars (\$55,327 for FY 2011) from other resources for VR AT projects, which ends up saving VR money. FY 2011, 233 service requests were authorized through the VR/ATP process. In addition, 295 individuals, including a variety of professionals, borrowed and utilized our AT for employment related purposes. This provides an opportunity for those professionals to learn more about a particular type of AT that can then be shared with a consumer, as well as having the opportunity for non professionals to "try AT before you buy" to see if that AT is really the best option for them. This obviously saves VR money." Leslie also explains, "Our partnership with VR is so important to us. The benefit to us is the sustainability factor, which allows us to put into action all the aspects necessary to provide the best AT outcome achievable for each VR consumer. It is a model partnership that other statewide AT Act programs could potentially replicate with their VR."

To learn more about the partnership between Nebraska's ATP and VR, contact: Leslie Novacek, Director, Assistive Technology Partnership, 3901 N. 27th Street, Suite 5, Lincoln, NE 68521. PHONE: 402-471-0734 FAX: 402-471-6052, email: [leslie.novacek@nebraska.gov](mailto:leslie.novacek@nebraska.gov), website: <http://www.atp.ne.gov>.