

## Public Awareness and Information and Assistance

### Definitions

#### Public Awareness

Although the AT Act does not provide a formal definition of public awareness, the Act described public awareness activities as activities “to provide information to targeted individuals and entities relating to the availability, benefits, appropriateness and costs of assistive technology devices and services”. This includes the development and distribution of informational materials regarding the state AT program’s efforts related to assistive technology, and communication between providers of assistive technology and targeted individuals and entities, including partnerships with employers, vocational rehabilitation, and public schools.

#### Information and Referral (Information and Assistance [I&A])

The AT Act does not include a formal definition of a statewide information and referral system, but describes the requirement of the State to provide for the “continuation and enhancement of a statewide information and referral system designed to meet the needs of targeted individuals and entities”. It further describes the content of the system as one that shall “...deliver information on assistive technology devices, assistive technology services (with specific data regarding provider availability within the State), and the availability of resources, including funding through public and private sources, to obtain assistive technology devices and assistive technology services. The system shall also deliver information on the benefits of assistive technology devices and assistive technology services with respect to enhancing the capacity of individuals with disabilities of all ages to perform activities of daily living.”

Information and Assistance is one component of public awareness.

### Characteristics

#### Public Awareness

Public awareness activities are designed to reach large numbers of people, and may include mass communications (public service announcements; TV and radio interviews; newspaper stories and columns), newsletters, brochures, websites, listservs, podcasts, and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn). Some states plan major public awareness activities such as an AT Awareness Day or month as proclaimed by the Governor; an exhibit in the State Capitol or in public libraries; or an AT Expo. State programs often will be exhibitors are statewide conferences that attract large numbers of attendees. Public awareness activities may be conducted in coordination and collaboration with other entities including state agencies and disability organizations, with financial support given to or received from other

entities. Quality public awareness activities are designed to reach targeted individuals throughout the state.

### **Information and Assistance**

Information and Assistance (I&A) is conducted to provide consumers with accurate, timely, and complete responses to their requests for information about assistive technology devices and services and about the AT services offered by the state AT program. AT programs should have a comprehensive and accessible web site that includes detailed information about the AT services offered by the program and related resources. Programs usually have a general email and phone number (including a toll-free line) that provide a way for the public to make inquiries. Ideally, the program also has a way to respond to inquiries in languages that are frequently spoken by individuals in the state, e.g. has a TTY or videophone line; subscribes to a "Language Line" or similar service. Public awareness activities may be conducted in coordination and collaboration with other entities including state agencies and disability organizations, with financial support given to or received from other entities.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Must the state AT program conduct public awareness activities?**

Yes. Public awareness, including information and assistance, are required components of the state leadership activities. Typically, funds for public awareness are part of the 40% a state expends on state leadership activities. However, if the state claims "flexibility", 30% of its funds will be divided among public awareness, training and technical assistance and collaboration. Limited funds for outreach may impact the degree to which targeted individuals are able to learn about the state AT program's resources.

#### **How can I tell if we are doing a good job of public awareness?**

Data reflecting utilization of state level services by type of individual served and the purpose of the AT (as collected as part of performance measures) and engagement of rural/urban residents (as collected from training participants) will provide a sketch of the degree to which the state AT program is successful in its outreach and public awareness. Some states choose to also collect data on the county I&A callers are from, where that information is available.

#### **Do our public awareness materials need to be in alternate formats and languages?**

State programs should be prepared to provide materials in alternate formats and languages. When distributing materials such as an exhibit table at events open to the general public or events that do not require pre-registration, it is appropriate for the state AT program to "model" accessibility by having its print literature available in a variety of formats, including Braille and large print. Input from the program's Advisory Council, analysis of who the program has or has not been able

to reach and serve, as well as reports from various data sources such as the American Community Survey (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>), may inform and influence the program's decisions impacting language translations.

**Our website is the primary way we provide public information. Should all materials (including videos, down-loadable forms and documents) be accessible?**

Yes! As a recipient of federal funds, and in the interest of modeling accessibility, your website should conform to Section 508 standards. Videos should be captioned, podcasts transcribed, and all documents including down-loadable forms should be accessible.

**We conducted an hour-long session at our state's Independent Living Conference explaining all the resources of the AT Act program, including those of the Alternate Financing Program and our other partners. Is this public awareness or training?**

If the primary purpose of the session was to provide information about the state's AT Act program, rather than to build participants' knowledge, skills, and competencies regarding assistive devices and services, it would be considered public awareness, even though you would be able to individually identify (and receive satisfaction surveys from) the participants.

**Do we need to have a staff person (or subcontractor) whose sole responsibility is Information and Assistance?**

The program may designate primary responsibility (e.g. daily checking of the I&A email and toll free phone line) to one staff member or subcontractor, although the program should have a plan to tap the expertise of staff or other resources in order to respond to complex requests. There is no requirement for the manner in which a state program implements its I&A activities as long as it satisfactorily provides for the "continuation and enhancement of a statewide information and referral system designed to meet the needs of targeted individuals and entities".

**Our reuse program includes two hours of individualized training for each recipient of a used computer. Is this reuse? Training? I&A?**

Individualized instruction is one way to "...deliver information on assistive technology devices", and is considered Information and Assistance. If there were several consumers receiving this instruction at the same time, it could be counted as training. However, care should be taken not to double count an activity. A decision should be made ahead of time as to how the activity will be classified, as different data, including satisfaction measures, may need to be collected for different activities. In addition, if the consumer is eligible for training on the devices and that service should be provided or paid for by another entity (e.g. VR or education), the program may violate the prohibition against supplanting.



# Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance & Training Center

## Resources

(Under Construction)

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