

Ability Tools California AT Act Technical Assistance & Reporting Webinar Transcript

March 25, 2021

- [Kathrine] Hi, everybody. Thanks for joining us today. My name is Kathrine Crowley. I am CFILC's Ability Tools Program Manager and I'd like to welcome you to Ability Tools' newest installments in the series of webinars outlining the activities established by the AT Act. Today, we'll be providing an overview of the activity technical assistance. For a few weeks there, we had this training advertised as technical assistance and state financing. We did this because we felt that since there isn't a lot of technical assistance done, which is typical across the nation, that we would combine the two topics in the interest of respecting your time. However, we have recently learned about some exciting new developments at DOR regarding state financing. So we'll be having a separate training next month to focus on all available state financing options, tried and true along with fresh and new, to ensure that we have enough time to dedicate to the new developments. So last month, we discussed the activity, device demonstration, because it was a natural potential step when thinking about how consumers become informed of the services available to them and begin to seek out services based on their individual needs. Using that trajectory of thought, we're continuing our journey alongside our hypothetical consumer which bring them to a technical assistance activity. Now this activity is by and large the least frequently reported activity in our state due to a minimal prevalence of this activity in our daily work. Our training objective for today will be to clarify the particulars of the activity, technical assistance as defined by the AT Act. This is with the intention of facilitating more an effective execution of technical assistance activities and also facilitating more comprehensive and accurate reporting of technical assistance activities. Now, asking yourself, is this activity a required activity for me to perform? If you're operating with AT Act funding, then yes. Technical assistance activities are required activities of the AT Act that you could potentially perform or participate in. Technical assistance activities exist within the state leadership category and are designed with the intention of facilitating a consumer's access to assistive technology. It's required by the federal government that state leadership activities take up about 40% of AT Act funding received by the state, with state level activities taking up about 60% of the state's AT ACT funding. So there is an expectation and built-in support for technical assistance activity implementation. Although the AT ACT doesn't include a formal definition, technical assistance is the process of providing targeted support to an organization with a development need or problem. This is accomplished via statewide AT program staff who provide direct problem-solving service to assist programs, organizations, and agencies in improving their services, management, policies or outcomes. Generally the purpose of technical assistance is to improve the capacity of the beneficiary organization as evidenced by increased efficiency, increased effectiveness or increased funding. So terminology and definitions can become tricky because California's AT advocates performing AT Act activities work within Independent Living Centers, and Independent Living Centers have their own lexicon of terminology and definitions provided by the language of their funding source, the Rehab Act. Independent Living Centers do perform activities referred to as technical assistance activities. But these activities are not the same as technical assistance activities as defined by the AT Act. As we just outlined AT Act technical assistance activities provide targeted support to an organization with a development need or problem with the intention of making systemic change. This definition greatly differs from the Rehab Act technical assistance which provides assistance to consumers with technical issues they're having with their AT, which if you remember from previous AT Act activity trainings is a form of information and assistance under AT Act definitions. Technical assistance is defined as direct problem solving service provided by statewide AT program staffed to assist programs and agencies in improving their services, management, policies and their outcomes. Now, speaking solely regarding the moving parts of the activity, technical assistance can be provided in-person, by electronic media such as telephone, video or email by other means, they can be provided to a multitude of groups like state and local educational agencies from pre-K, K through 12, post-secondary education and beyond, other state and local agencies, early intervention programs, adult service programs, hospitals and other healthcare facilities, workplaces, groups that work with specific demographics like the aging community, developmental disability communities, or even those with the focus on specific disabilities like ALS. Really it's applicable to so many groups except for just loose groups of community organizers. So examples of technical assistance that can be performed in partnership with this far from exhaustive list of eligible entities are needs assessments, like an organization reaching out to see if their website is accessible and then taking the steps along with you to be able to make it accessible. Program planning or development, this is a great example. A great example of this would be the work with the public, the California Public Utilities Commission or the CPUC, regarding battery requirements and access and functional needs or AFN backups, Curriculum or materials development, I'm personally engaging in a series of interactions with a business who wants to ensure that their materials are accessible to all of their consumers. And this will likely solidify into a technical assistance activity. Administrative or management consultation, which is pretty self-explanatory. You meet with the administrative team on a company, learn about their work and troubleshoot any accessibility issues they likely aren't even aware of. Program evaluation and site reviews of external organizations. Like the straw campaign if all of you remember when the State of California banned single use plastic straws in full service restaurants, unless the customer requests one, this was much to the detriment of many members of the disability community, straws can be a key accommodation and a piece of assistive technology for people with disabilities, enabling individuals to drink and or eat. Having access to straws, historically plastic straws allows people with disabilities access to independence, community integration and public life. With support from the Monterey Bay Aquarium, CFILC conducted the nation's first study on the disability community experience with non-plastic alternative straws. The study found that Californians do not have to choose between providing access to people with disabilities and reducing harm to the environment. And as a result, people were able to go to local policymakers with the study's findings and ensure that the local ordinance development engage with people with disabilities as they need to be included in planning. Also policy development or change. A great example of this will be our upcoming work with a regional company to improve their tangible product, this technical assistance we'll be reaching across the state and we'll provide real actionable items for the company to work on to ensure that their product is born accessible, not simply marketed to the general population with an accessible line, but a focus on customers having all options available to them, a seamless integration of AT into the core of their product line. As you can probably surmise from what we've outlined so far technical assistance activities are very complex and long-term activities. Typically technical assistance activities are in such a grand scale that a single AT advocate wouldn't be performing them independently, simply because the workload would be so massive. They wouldn't be able to do this while simultaneously performing their multitude of other job duties. This is why most times technical assistance activities will be organized by the hub, Ability Tools as the AT Act implementing agency. Now I used very purposeful language there. When I said typically a single AT advocate will not be performing a technical assistance activity. And also when I said that the state hub typically organizes the activity. So let's look at my first qualifier. Yes, typically technical assistance... Sorry, had a technical malfunction there. Typically technical assistance is not gonna be performing being AT advocate. This is also... one second, because they're so massive workload wise that a single AT advocate isn't gonna be performing them independently but there are instances where AT advocates assist smaller entities requesting ongoing assistance on a single systemic need, where you might have a local agency reach out to you multiple times because they require your expertise. Now, AT advocates are a skilled group of individuals and are more than capable of guiding agencies who are attempting to improve policies and procedures to be fully inclusive. For example, your local regional center could call you every day for two weeks with questions about the kinds of experience, certifications and education AT providers should have. This collection of interactions would amount to a technical assistance. As the regional center is trying to make a systemic improvement in their vetting process of AT providers in their network, by answering the question what should we require of assistive technology providers. This would amount to a systemic change that would greatly improve the quality of services to all of that regional centers clients Have you been over the course of multiple interactions assisting other organizations in transitioning from face-to-face services to virtual? If so, what you've been up to could be considered a technical assistance activity. Now onto my second qualifier that the state hub typically is the body engaging in organizing large and sometimes statewide technical assistance activities. This was something I thought would be important to point out the majority of technical assistance activities are indeed implemented by the hub Ability Tools. But that doesn't mean that we do it alone. In most instances, it makes the most sense that we serve as organizers who facilitate the implementation of the technical assistance activity through the partnership with advocates and center staff throughout the state. Technical assistance activities are fantastic opportunities to build the capacity of staff across the state. Participants can build professional development skills in advocacy, project management, device implementation, social media networking and ultimately get to take part in work that amounts to a greater sum of our parts that makes meaningful change for our community. Activities under the AT Act which commonly become confused with technical assistance, our information and assistance activities. This is completely understandable. As we earlier discussed in the State of California the Rehab Act and the AT Act live under the same roof. And this is one of those instances where a shared lexicon with differing definitions causes a lot of disruption. There are quite a few markers to assist you in determining whether the activity you're trying to report is a technical assistance activity or an information and assistance activity. First off when performing technical assistance activities, support is provided to entities as opposed to information and assistance activities which is providing one-on-one support to individual consumers. Technical assistance activities also consist of multiple interactions. Whereas information and assistance activities typically consists of a single interaction. Additionally, technical assistance activities typically are long-term projects working toward a resolution of organizational change and information and assistance activities are typically quickly resolved. Also, if you look at what gets reported at the end of the year, a very low number of technical assistance activities are performed throughout the year, like two to three for the entire State of California. Whereas a high number of information and assistance activities are performed throughout the year. Ultimately for me, it's always easiest to determine where an activity should be reported based on the fundamental goal of the interaction and with technical assistance, where we're trying to address a systemic issue that will hopefully bring about systemic change for members of our community. This has a broader scope in the specificity of information and assistance activities where we're trying to address a single issue that our consumer has come to us with. Technical assistance activities can also be commonly conflated with training activities which makes sense as a great deal of technical assistance activities begin with a training. It isn't unusual for an entity to request a training on a topic and upon receiving the training realize that there is a greater systemic issue at play in their organization. At which point they then reach out to continue addressing that systemic issue with the ultimate goal of implementing policy change to remedy the shortcoming. It's therefore perfectly acceptable for the first interaction with an entity to be recorded as a training and the resulting collection of interactions to be counted toward the greater accumulation of interactions that a technical assistance activity consists of. As with any AT activity, looking at the end goal of the activity is your best tool to determine under which category an activity should be recorded. Aiming to educate with the intention of addressing a systemic change, a need for an entity that could result in a policy, finding or accessibility changes for the organization would be a technical assistance activity. This is versus educating a group of people on a topic where they learn valuable skills to address a specific training need, which would be a training activity. Technical assistance activities consist of multiple interactions over time versus training activities which consists of a single recorded interaction. Technical assistance activities typically are long-term projects that are resolved over the course of multiple interactions with tailored work requiring a great deal of preparation and expertise which addresses the specific need of the interacting entity. This is versus trainings, which although also require the aforementioned preparation and expertise to ensure that they're as full of as much quality content as possible. The activity itself is typically quickly resolved with the preparation work, being useful to rinse and repeat so to speak, with minor alterations to fit the needs of other groups who could benefit from this educational activity. Finally, if you look at what gets reported at the end of the year, a very low number of technical assistance activities are performed throughout the year. Again, only two or three across the State of California. This can be compared to the moderate number of training activities that are performed throughout the year around a couple of months across the State of California. So DOR has determined that the AT Act and AT advocates will be supported under the same roof as ILCs, which is very unique as California is the only state which does this. California AT advocates and the hub Ability Tools perform state leadership activities and Ability Tools at the hub performs and contracts out the performance of state level activities. As is the case with California's Device Lending and Demonstration Centers or DLDCs. One of our requirements as the hub is to collect, organizing report all state leadership and level activity data to the federal government. In order for us to count all of the hard work that gets done it needs to be individually reported by the centers performing the activities. National Assistive Technology Act Data System, or NATADS is the web-based aggregate data reporting system used by state AT programs to submit the required data elements of the APR as mandated by the AT Act. NATADS primary purpose is to serve as the official APR collection mechanism. However, NATADS has also has a web-based day-to-day data collection system that can be optionally used by state AT programs for collecting and managing data reporting for all activities included in the state plan for AT and required by the annual progress report. As a result of this day-to-day reporting option being available as a central reporting system, capable of ensuring the validation of all of California's data. California's Assisted Technology Advisory Council and the department of rehabilitation made the decision that California would utilize NATADS for collecting the data relevant to our state's AT Act activities. Upon your reminder email this morning you should have received a word document titled NATADS Activity Guide- Technical Assistance Activity Entry. I'm, now going to do a live walkthrough of the steps you'll go through to enter your technical assistance activity. So first as usual you're going to want to start with your log-in. You're going to be using your work email and your unique password. You should have chosen your own unique password once you got your basic credentials that gave you, a basic password I give to everybody. And so I strongly encourage everybody once they've gotten their new credentials to update their password, make it unique to them. So go ahead and Log in. And from there, you're going to go to Day to Day New. So you want to verify that your participant is a client in NATADS, but we have gone over the process of checking to see if your participant is a client and also how to enter that client in previous webinars. So I don't wanna waste your time going through it again today. If you wanna do a walkthrough of what that process is like, go ahead and go back to the training library, take a look at the information and assistance elements of our training series. And it'll go through a complete walkthrough of the checking where if the consumer is a client and entering the consumer, if they're not. So we're just going to go ahead and say that we have checked. We have our client in the system and go ahead and continue on with entering a technical assistance activity. So you're going to follow down your NATADS Day To Day Application screen and underneath the banner, under State Leadership Functions, you're going to select the button titled Technical Assistance. On the next screen, Technical Assistance Home under the banner titled Technical Assistance Functions you're going to select the button Add Technical Assistance Activity. And this is gonna take you to the Technical Assistance Entry screen. So on this screen Technical Assistance Entry under the banner titled Date and User, enter the following information. So in the Date field it's going to automatically populate with the current date. So you must modify the field to match the date the technical assistance activity occurred. However, by the nature of technical assistance activities the activity will occur over a date range and not a single date. So when determining you should base it on the date that the technical assistance activity was completed as this was the date that the goal of the activity was met and a systemic change could be implemented on the part of the participating agency. In the Entered By field, this is gonna be automatically generated with the name of the person signed into NATADS based on the login information used to enter the database and cannot be altered, for this reason it is important to always use your personal account so that the data can be validated. Continuing down the screen, under the Clients Related to Technical Assistance, banner there will be a records table with an Add Clients button located just under the banner. This section is where you enter your clients from the client database, to do this, select the aforementioned Add Clients button. And the form will appear over the Technical Assistance Entry page. You'll be able to search for existing clients by using the Search By function. And you're going to select the most appropriate choice from the dropdown menu of search type options. You can see there are a variety of options. I always find it easiest to go by the person's name 'cause that's usually the information I have at hand. In the following field you enter that you the information that you're going to search by and you select Search and the form will display the results in your search. From the form, select the hyperlink name of the client that you wish to associate with the technical assistance activity and at the top of the form, a notification banner will alert you that the client has been added. Repeat this action until you have added all involved clients, select the Close button at the bottom left of the records table of the form, and you can continue adding data to your technical assistance activity. Continuing down the screen under the banner titled Technical Assistance Information, enter the following information. Select your primary recipient from the dropdown menu. Your options are going to be Education, Employment, Health, Allied Health and Rehab, Community Living, Technology, IT, Telecom and AT. Just select whichever is most relevant to the person that you're working with, to the group that you're working with. In the next field, you're going to enter the total hours spent on the technical assistance here. You're gonna wanna keep track of how much time you spend working on this activity and you can enter the total here. In the next field, you're gonna to be selecting your technical assistance type. So for technical assistance, you're going to select this option if technical assistance was not innovative or high impact or related to transition. So if it doesn't fit into these two fields that follow just general technical assistance you can select general technical assistance. Now, when it comes to the other fields I'll give you some explanations on what those means so that you can better discern where it belongs. So for innovative or high-impact technical assistance you can select this option, if the topic was innovative, so utilized unique delivery modes. So for example, a fully virtual collaboration. If it reached a different audience than typically reached in your work, for example private companies or agencies not directly related to the disability community, or if it's a topic that's unique or new. So an example could be newly rolled out WCAG guidelines. You could also select this option if it was high impact. So if the technical assistance had a broad scope which impacted a large region, for example a statewide impact or if it impacts groups in a significant way. So emergency related assistance or had high numbers of individuals impacted. So you could not necessarily be a large area region but it could be a densely populated area. So you're still hitting a whole lot of individuals. So if you're wanting to find out, if you can add it to your technical assistance related to the transition the easy way to know that is you're selecting that options if it was related to school, employment or community living transition. So any kind of change in life really is a transition piece. If you're helping people in move out of an assisted living facility and aging place at home, if you're assisting young students in transitioning from high school, into post-secondary education or into their new job after school that would be a technical assistance related to transition. Now, if you continue down the screen under the description banner, there's gonna be a text box with a 10,000 character count limit. You're gonna enter the following, enter the date. So the month, day, year range of the life of the technical assistance activity, this is where you can really get that full scope of the range that you want to able to put in with the date up above. You're gonna put in the medium, whether it was in-person, virtual, you're gonna put in the staff that were involved. So the first and last name and the title of the staff that were involved on your end. So the AT advocate, DLDC manager and the organization name. So the name of the center. You're gonna put the characteristics of the recipient agency whenever that's applicable, you're gonna put in a description of the agency receiving this technical assistance and how that technical assistance topic was relevant to their needs. You're gonna describe the technical assistance characteristics, outline the details of the anteceding interaction, outlined the systemic challenges being addressed by the technical assistance. Describe the positive results or the impact of the technical assistance, the successful learning objectives of the technical assistance and how they're going to benefit the community. Continuing down the screen under the Notes banner there's gonna be a text box with a 10,000 character count limit again. Enter any unique issues related to the technical assistance. There's plenty of unique circumstances that have been happening over the course of the year. So I'm sure that there are plenty of interesting notes to be added to these fields. From there, select the Save button in the bottom left corner of the page to complete the entry of your technical assistance activity. And you will have completed entry of your TA activity. So let's go ahead and start the Q&A with a few questions for you. We're gonna do that in the form of a couple of polls. So Megan, if you'd like to go ahead and launch the polls I would be eternally grateful.

- [Megan] This is Megan. I'm happy to do that. I'll go ahead and read them out too. So our first poll says what role best describes your participation in today's webinar? And the options are individual with the disability, family advocate, guardian or authorized representative, representative of education, representative of employment, representative of health, allied health or rehab, representative of community living, representative of technology or other. We have about half of you have entered. So I'll go ahead and give you about 30 more seconds on this one. Close, we have 17 out of you on here. Thank you. I'm gonna go ahead to end that poll and then we have a second question here, we wanna know, where are you from? It's a quick, there's two answers. So it says, are you from a metro urban or non-metro rural area? And the options are metro or non-metro. So let's see where folks are at. We have about half of you have answered this one and I am not terribly surprised, but 80% of our... Oh, it's gone down a bit. 73% of our group seems to be from a Metro area and 20 not, oh, changed 71, 29. So majority of us are Metro but quite a few non-metro as well which is nice to see. I'm gonna go ahead and end that poll. Thank you guys for doing that. And then Kathrine, we do have a question that's already come in. Are you ready for that?

- [Kathrine] Yeah, let's go for it.

- [Megan] So it's coming from Joe and he wants to know, he's saying when on NATADS, his technical assistance button is grayed out. And I think that might be the case for most of the people when they go into NATADS. Is that correct?

- [Kathrine] Yep, I knew this was gonna be the first question, Joe was quick on the buzzer. So recently when we were putting together the APR last year there were a lot of issues with mis-attributed activities. And so it took a lot of work to kind of sift through everything. And when we talked to the people on a nationwide level the guidance that I got from several people was that we needed to turn off the button until we had the training completely down. It wasn't gonna be that huge of an issue since again, it's something that only happens two or three times, and we already had this training slated. So we went ahead and turn off the button to make sure that no more erroneous information was put into NATADS by mistake. And so it's gonna be... we're gonna do a little bit more to reinforce this training probably at the AT advocates meetings to just make sure that everybody has this information down and we should be able to unlock that button again.

- [Megan] This is Megan. In the meantime, if folks do feel like they're participating or doing a technical assistance activity and they wanna start reporting it what should they do so that they can record it?

- [Kathrine] What they can do is they can go ahead and do one of two things, or honestly do both. The first interaction is most typically gonna end up being a training. That really is the most typical way that a technical assistance occurs is it starts as a training and then the organization you're working with goes, wow, I didn't know what I didn't know. And that's when it turns into a technical assistance. And so go ahead and enter it as a training sort of as a bookmark. So, you have it in there and reach out to me, shoot me an email and I can either unlock it for your region so that you can enter it and then lock it back down until I get the okay to keep it unlocked fully or I can enter it in for you. And we can just talk on the phone and you can give me the information over the phone. I'm always happy to assist.

- [Megan] Thank you, Kathrine. And I went ahead and put your email in the chat although I think everyone on this call for the most part should have it. And I just threw in our question, you mentioned APR, could you spend a minute telling folks what the APR is and what goes into compiling that so they understand why we may be blocking things out of NATADS

- [Kathrine] Yeah, sure. Okay, so the APR stands for the annual progress report. It is my joy and eternal pain to be putting together and compiling all of the data for the annual performance report. We go over it throughout the year. We do a quarterly reporting where we go and we report it to the ATAC, the Assistive Technology Advisory Council. And we let them know what the State of California has been doing over the past year on a quarterly basis. You guys have had invitations and some of you have attended the ATAC meetings and you've been able to kind of see what that looks like and kind of get a peek behind the curtain of how these things work. And so it can sometimes, it takes a bit to make sure that all of that data is clean. I go through every single activity that gets entered into the system by all 28 of the Independent Living Centers and by all 12 of the Device Lending and Demonstration Centers. And so it is definitely a problem if sometimes we get things that are reported in the wrong place 'cause it can take a lot to get everything kind of scrubbed and put away properly, if that makes any sense. So the technical assistance issue was such a prolific mistake that is completely understandable. Like I said, people are working in Independent Living Centers and technical assistance means something completely different according to the Rehab Act but either way we needed to kind of control the situation. 'Cause it was really skewing our numbers. It was making a lot of inaccurate reports. So we go through, we check all of these activities, we build these reports with not only just the number of the activities but details about the activities, names of the activities. I know every public awareness event that all of you guys go to if it gets reported. And so it's really important that we have this accurate information. And the reason that we give such specific details on what you put in like the anecdotal areas is because when we go in, we can look and say, "Oh, wow, look, there was an uptick "in this specific area for this specific device." And in situations like with the DLDCs we can then know that we need to allocate specific spending toward that device because that's obviously something that's needed in that region. And it's really useful for us to be able to show the federal government when we report the APR at the end of the year to say, "Hey, look this is what we're doing. "And this is what it's going toward. "And this is why you're funding us. "And will you please continue funding us "and possibly fund more?" So it's very vital information that we are collecting through NATADS. It's really, although it may seem a bit mundane and being county it's really important to the work that we do.

- [Megan] Thank you, Kathrine. And I hope that helped folks better understand what we're doing as a network. If you do have more questions, please send them to us in the Q&A, we do have one here, Kathrine and it's gonna ask you to go back to the NATADS website and screen-share that. We didn't get the opportunity to see you go through, creating a consumer or finding a consumer but folks wanna know where do they go on NATADS to update their password.

- [Kathrine] Oh, okay. I don't know if I can show that without showing you guys my private stuff but what you can do is if you come up to this upper right hand corner of any page on NATADS you're gonna see three icons. There's gonna be a help icon. There's going to be a my account icon and there's going to be a log-out icon. I know most of you are grumbling and saying I don't need that log-out icon. It automatically locks me out whenever I don't want it to. So I don't really need to manually log out. What you're gonna do is you're going to select the middle icon that says My Account. It looks like a person from the chest up with a little cog next to it. And that's where you can make modifications to your account. And if all else fails, if it gives you trouble give me a call guys because I am able to change your passwords. I'm able to update any information, if it's just too annoying. And I know sometimes that can be the case, shoot me an email, give me a call and I'd be happy to make any modifications you need.

- [Megan] Thank you. And this is Megan. Just remember that everyone should have their own NATADS login if they're going to be logging in and then reporting data here. So if you have someone at your center that supports you with entering data and they need a login, please connect them with Kathrine. That way we're able to validate who's inputting what information. I don't see any other questions. If folks have any, please send them to us. But if not, I think we can go ahead and start wrapping up, Kathrine.

- [Kathrine] All right, that sounds great. If you guys have any questions, need any clarification or any concerns kind of like with the technical assistance button, feel free to reach out. We're always here. Honestly, I think that kind of is it. Since it's such an infrequent activity and everything we've been doing is a virtual for the past year, I don't really even see we need to open to discuss complications and considerations due to COVID-19. So yeah, reach out to myself via email or phone number. You guys have both of those. I can give it out constantly and I'll be happy to be able to provide any assistance you need.