

California AT Act Public Awareness & Reporting Webinar Transcript

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>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: My name is Kathrine Crowley, I'm CFILC's AT Access Coordinator, and I'd like to welcome you to Ability Tool's first installment in a series of webinars outlining the activities established by the AT Act. Today we'll be providing an overview of the activity public awareness, this felt like a natural entry point for this series as most community members first learn about their Independent Living Centers and AT Advocates through public awareness activities. This series will serve as a guide to the typical journey members of the disability community can experience when obtaining AT Act funded services.

Our training objective for today will be to clarify the particulars of the activity public awareness as it is defined by the AT Act. This is with the intention of facilitating more frequent and effective execution of public awareness activities under the AT Act, and also facilitating more comprehensive and accurate reporting of public awareness activities under the AT Act. The AT Act does not provide a formal definition of public awareness, rather it is described as activities designed to provide information to targeted individuals and entities related to the availability, benefits, appropriateness, and costs of assistive technology devices and services. Terminology and definitions can become tricky, because AT Advocates 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.

The Independent Living Center activity most similar to public awareness is outreach. Outreach is practically identical to public awareness in it's execution. But as we progress through this AT Activities series, I'll draw comparisons between AT Act definitions and Rehab Act definitions. This is because the nature of having both required sets of activities being executed under the same roof can sometimes cause confusion when the definitions don't line up as closely as today's activity of discussion, public awareness does with it's Rehab Act counterpart outreach.

You might be asking yourself is this activity a required activity for me to perform? If you're operating with AT Act funding, then yes, public awareness activities are required activities. Public awareness activities exist within the state leadership category, and all activities within this category 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 the remaining 60% going to state level activities. So there is an expectation and built-in support for public awareness activity implementation. Public awareness encompasses developing and distributing informational materials regarding the availability, cost, benefits, and appropriateness of assistive technology and how your state AT program is facilitating this information and these technologies getting to members of the disability community. These materials are intended to communicate with individuals and entities who could benefit from or serve to provide assistive technology to those whose lives could improve from their use.

Examples of these materials are developing and distributing brochures, developing tip sheets that can benefit the community as needed online or be distributed at events, creating and maintaining websites and listservs, and fostering an active social media presence. Centers can publish and archive newsletters, video newsletters, or blogs. Importantly, special care should be taken to ensure that your materials are born accessible, that there are physical versions of your materials available in braille, large print, and commonly utilized languages in your community. And care should be taken when developing these materials to be accessible to those with processing disabilities, considering color contrast, font type, and size. Additionally, virtual versions should be formatted to be accessible to screen readers and videos should be captioned and transcribed.

The variety of accessible materials should be taken to events to ensure that your efforts can benefit your entire community. Public awareness also deals with communication between assistive technology providers and the individuals and entities who would benefit from their technologies. This can include fostering and maintaining partnerships with schools, vocational rehabilitation centers, and employers. As might be evident already, public awareness is executed under the wide scope of mass communication. Some more active activities like participating in radio interviews, television interviews, podcasts, news stories, newspaper columns, public forums, and public service announcements would also fall under public awareness. Public awareness activities can include typically more costly and or coordinated events like interactive exhibits in libraries or in state capitols, or tabling at AT expos, conferences, or community centers and community events. Or even coordinating with public officials to create AT awareness events like an AT Awareness Day, similar to an effort of another program of CFILC, YO! Disabled &amp; Proud, has been working to designate July as Disability Pride month.

The wide scope is how public awareness activities mostly differ from the activity information and assistance, which it is commonly conflated with. Public awareness utilizes a wide scope which is intended to reach a broad audience. Information and assistance activities use a much more narrow scope. When AT Advocates perform information and assistance activities, they are addressing specific concerns of their consumer and directing them to relevant resources to their specific situation. Which leads to another difference, public awareness activities are about disseminating general information that is related to assistive technology. Whereas information and assistance has the aforementioned tailored information transfer.

Additionally, public awareness activities in general won't allow you to be able to identify all participants. Versus information and assistance, which are much more intimate and focused types of information dissemination to a specific consumer who you can easily identify and interact with. Another activity under the AT Act which commonly becomes confused with public awareness activities is training. Examining the intended outcome of an activity should help determine whether it should be reported under public awareness or training. Public awareness activities include activities designed for the purpose of general awareness of assistive technology and state AT programs. They do not include activities with the intended outcome of participants applying new knowledge or skills in addressing AT devices and or service issues. Activities such as these should be reported under training.

Public awareness activities provide a breadth of information versus training which has a more depth focus and skill building focus, and it relies on competency development. If the purpose of an activity is to create awareness, the session should be classified as public awareness activity. Additionally in general, when performing a public awareness activity, it is typically not possible to identify each participant individually. Whereas with training activities, participants or their affiliations can typically be identified. DOR has determined that the AT Act and AT Advocates will be supported under the same roof as Independent Living Centers, which is very unique, as California is the only state which does this.

AT Advocates and the hub, Ability Tools, perform leadership activities, and Ability Tools as 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. As we continue further into the series, we will discuss state level activities in much greater detail. One of our requirements as the hub is to collect, organize, and 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 data collection mechanism. However, NATADS also has a web-based day-to-day data collection system that can optionally be 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 the availability of this day-to-day reporting option, as a central reporting system, capable of ensuring the validation of all of California's data, California's Assistive 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: Public Awareness Activity Entry. It looks like this. So I'm going to go ahead and do a live walk through of the steps that you'll go through to enter your public awareness activities into NATADS. All of these steps are detailed in this guide for future reference, or you can come back to our training library and review this webinar if you have any further questions.

So how you're going to start is you're going to login to NATADS using your User ID, your username is going to be your email address and your password is going to be a unique password to yourself. [Keyboard clicks] Once you're in, you're going to select day-to-day new. If you're going to be entering your public awareness activity, you'll look underneath the state leadership functions and find the button titled public awareness and select it. On the next screen Public Awareness Home, under the banner titled Public Awareness Functions, select the button "Add Public Awareness Activity". On the next screen, Public Awareness Entry under the banner titled Date and User, enter the following information. So under date, you're going to, this will automatically populate with today's date. What you're going to do is you're going to modify the date to match the day which the public awareness activity you are entering occurred.

The Entered By field will already generate the name of the person signed into NATADS based on the login information used to enter the database and it cannot be altered. For this reason it is important to always use your personal account so that the data can be validated. Continuing down on the same screen, under the Narrative banner, there will be a text box with a 10,000 character count limit. You are going to want to enter the following information: A date and time range, so the month, day, year to the month, day, year. There are a lot of expos that we go to that take place over the course of multiple days, and add in the times that you were there from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM maybe. You're going to enter in the location, the name of the venue, and the address of the venue. You'll enter in a medium, whether it was done using telecommunication, online, webinar, or in-person. You can put in the type, whether you were tabling at an expo, tabling at a fair, performing a radio interview. The staff that were involved, so the first and last name and title and the organization that they're affiliated with. You can put in the name and the purpose of the event, what content did you, what content did you provide that was relevant to the purpose of this event?

Describe the activity, was it innovative or high impact, number of tables, types of interactions with participants. Events such as these can facilitate opportunities to participate in device demonstrations, in trainings alongside the public awareness activity itself. And any other details of note. You're going to want to estimate the participants and their potential demographic categories, such as rural, urban, educators, or self-advocates. And materials and reuse items that were disseminated, the type, the amounts. Be sure to outline any potential positive outcomes. An educator learning about services for their students, a consumer learning about a service and saying that they're now going to go seek it out.

And then you're going to select the save button underneath the left corner of the narrative text box to complete your entry of your public awareness activity. And it was that simple, you've now completed your entry of your public awareness activity. Of the activities that you're going to be entering into NATADS, public awareness is the, probably the most easiest to enter in. It's just going to be a narrative, a descriptive narrative. You're not, it's not numbers driven. It's mostly qualitative information driven. [Mouse clicks] So now we have time to do a Q&amp;A and some discussion, so that we can answer any questions that might need some clarification, any concerns about reporting or performing the activities, and maybe have a discussion about how everybody individually interacts with these events and how COVID has been impacting their ability to perform these events. And Megan, I don't have access to the chat or the Q&A right now, so if you can let me know if anything pops up, that would be fantastic.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: This is Megan, it looks like we do have one question that just came in the Q&A. Uh, Michelle wants to know, could we potentially have the same activities entered in more than one category?

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Well, you could have the same event in more than one category, but it wouldn't be the same activity. So for example, let's say you go to an AT Expo, and you are doing your public awareness activity by tabling. You have six tables and you have a bunch of items spread out. Your promotional materials spread out. You can feasibly if you have enough staff to actually facilitate this, you could do device demonstrations with people. Do one-on-one demonstrations comparing devices that you have available at your table and perform a device demonstration and collect the performance measures from that consumer that they interact with. Those are two separate activities occurring at the same event. You could also um, have one of your advocates participating at the event who puts on a, a presentation that is a training on specific use of a specific AT item. I've seen um, advocates at expos do these very deep dives on a specific type of AT that they're wanting to get information out to the community and that would be considered a training. And you can get the demographic information of your participants, you may not be able to identify each person by name, but you can collect the amount of people that participated in a training like that. So, yes and no. Same activity, no. It only counts as one. But events do present a lot of opportunities to have different activities pop-up within the event. I hope that answered your question.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Thank you, and Michelle if that didn't answer, please let us know in the Q&A for follow-up. Um, we have another question here from Vincent, he says "Can we get NATADS to do drop-down menus for the requirements for the activity and not just put the narrative in the text box? I feel some of the requirements will be missed unless they are required fields.

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: I, I can discuss that with Vance, um, he's the developer or NATADS. I can discuss it with him and see if we can come up with some drop-down fields. Um, I think that it mostly has to do with the way that the information is being collected pursuant to the AT Act mandates. And so, they're asking for a specific type of information entry, and we're, we're doing what they're asking us to do. So that might be a restriction that wouldn't allow us to kind of, cause I know that when we used to have um, our reporting at the Ability Tools site that it was formatted very differently. Um, and there were a lot more opportunities to sort of do data entry when you're putting in, um, these um activities rather than constructing a narrative. Um, I'm, I believe that the reason that NATADS is structured the way it is is because it is closer to what the, the federal legislation is requiring of us. So I can talk to him and I can see what elements we might be able to put into that drop-down function, so that it is more accessible. More um, intuitive for individuals to use. If you find yourself having trouble remembering everything that's required, um, you're always going to have these guides. I'm going to be putting out, I'm going to be developing and putting out these guides for each individual activity that is going to be entered into NATADS, and if you have questions, you have a list of what information needs to be put into it on that guide. Um, I'm a very visual person and so I have a tendency to kind of create cheat sheets and print them out and tape them up to my desk. And so you can go ahead and do something like that, or you can just have them ready on your desktop to be able to click into to double-check. Um, another good tactic that I've used before is I've grabbed a previous activity that I felt confident that I got all the information into, and I copy it, and then I paste it into my new activity and I replace the information that I have for this new activity. So I basically have these fields that I know I need to enter the new information into. I hope that was useful.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Thank you. So we have a question here from Keith. He says "What about a radio interview that you speak about AT along with some of the other services at your center? How would you count that?"

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: That would definitely fall under public awareness, we've um, I can go back to our list, cause there's so many different public awareness activities that we can participate in. Um, and we have radio interviews, uh, under the options of potential public awareness activities. If you have questions regarding how it should be entered, basically the list that's given in the activity guide is extensive and it grabs all of the information that would be relevant. It's not something that is relevant to the activity you're performing, you don't need to worry about that. You can't collect how many people are listening to your radio interview, so you can't collect those kinds of numbers. You can say that it was, it was impossible to ascertain the amount of people reached through this radio interview. Um, but you can give the location and the time and the date and give the information about the radio station that you're working with so that it gives a complete picture of the information that you do have on hand. Um, obviously you're not going to be handing out brochures or anything, but you could put in that you shared the link to your website, that um you shared um, an opportunity for people to join a listserv so that they can be able to get your newsletters from your center. So it really is just about looking at that list, that comprehensive list of information regarding a public awareness activity, and just seeing what's relevant to what you're up to. It doesn't need to all be answered if it doesn't apply to your activity.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Perfect, thank you. And Kathrine, can you clarify what kind of public awareness activities would count as high impact or innovative?

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Oh, and that one is difficult, because it is a very relative concept. Um, high impact or innovative to my understanding of it, it more has to do with the type of information that you're giving out. If you're giving out um, information. Let's say you've got new programs that are impactful in your community, like um CFILC just recently launched their DDAR Program um, that's pretty high impact. That impacts the entire state. That is something that is going to be relevant to many community members. And it's um, sending out brochures and giving out information regarding that program, that would be considered high impact or innovative. Um, if you're doing, um, anything to do with, um, new tech, new technologies that are coming out. Um, I would say if you're supporting your consumers by providing, um, Zoom webinar instruction, that's pretty uh innovative. That, you have to be careful that when you're giving that information, it's general information about maybe you have Zoom available for you to use, Blackboard available for you to use, things that are, um, ways, innovative ways for your community to interact with each other and to interact in their employment, or in their education, but as soon as it crosses into a training where you're giving them specific information on how to navigate Zoom, and how to operate the chat feature, that's when it goes into training territory.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Great, thank you. And if folks have other questions, please feel free to enter them into the Q&A box, but I'm not seeing any additional questions at this time.

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Alright, great. Um, I'd be happy to answer anything else and it would be wonderful to open up discussion if possible, um, regarding what you find yourselves doing. Let's see if I can get to that slide. What are you guys doing for public awareness activities? I'm curious to know what you do leading up to an event? During an event? And following an event? That helps you gather the information that you need to gather and helps you make sure that what you're doing is as impactful as possible for your community. There's also, um, special considerations that have been occurring due to COVID. I've been hearing a lot of people that they've been having so much trouble performing public awareness activities because typically that's us going to an event and tabling and shaking hands and talking with people, and that's not something that can happen right now. Um, if you want to discuss the challenges, and um, any positive changes that may have unexpectedly come up due to it. That would be a great source of discussion and um, professional development. I know that um, as a result of COVID, most of the public awareness activities that were not available to um, to me, are now becoming available. I was able to attend the New Jersey AT um, Expo and I wouldn't have been able to attend that before because it wasn't virtual, it was only in-person. And so this opens up a lot of avenues for individuals with disabilities who might even before COVID not have been able to travel to a lot of these activities and uh would not have been able to participate, and so um, an interesting byproduct is that people are now able to participate more fully in some ways.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Kathrine, this is Megan. Are we wanting folks to raise their hand to share public awareness activities or to put them in the Q&A?

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Whichever they want to do, um, whatever they feel most comfortable with would be fantastic.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Perfect, and we do have something in the Q&A here from Vincent. He says "If we do a YouTube video that was posted in the past, can it still count every month on the number of hits it received for public awareness?"

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: You know, I've never sat down and gotten into the nitty gritty on that before, but that does make sense that it should. Um, because you performed the public awareness activity, it wasn't, it would be like saying that creating a brochure is the only way that it gets counted, and that's not true. You get credit for handing out brochures at these events. And so this is in a way a virtual version of that, and so um, I can get back to you if I'm wrong, but I'm under the impression that yes, being able to collect that information does count. Many centers will enter their information regarding how um, many hits they got on their social media pages, um, and how many people signed up for their listservs, and that is a sort of, a passive way of collecting public awareness activities. If that make sense. You know you have these very active ways where you're going and participating at events specifically, but then there are these more passive ways where you create materials that people interact with them over time.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Thank you, and Vince let us know if that does not clarify the question for you. Um, so if folks do want to you can raise your hand on here to ask, uh, to participate, or share in the Q&A. Um, in the Q&A Michelle from DRAIL shared that "One of the things we are trying to continue to do outreach is by group meetings conducted by our community advocates. If we provide general AT info at these meetings, could that be considered?"

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: So these meetings are specifically geared towards the consumers and the AT Advocates are leading them?

>> MEGAN COWDELL: So it looks like they're being led by community advocates at the centers and the AT Advocates are joining to provide AT info.

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Then yeah, definitely as long as the AT Advocates are taking a lead and providing that information regarding the center, regarding the state AT program, regarding the activities that are available to the consumers under the AT Act, then yes, that would certainly be considered public awareness. If it's specific information about specific AT, um, then you're getting closer to training. And so that's where, that's where that line really is. As long as it's general information, you're providing information about DRAIL, um, you're providing information about Ability Tools, then that is very much public awareness activity.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Awesome, and Michelle says thank you. Uh, Jose says he hosts a workshop twice a month for individuals with vision loss to join and learn about assistive technology. He explains the overview of technology, but doesn't do training. Would that be considered public awareness?

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Yeah, that to me sounds like a public awareness activity, specifically within the innovative and high impact category. Um, as long as, again, I'm going to keep stressing it, cause it is the biggest um, conflation when I'm going in and I'm looking at the data when I'm putting together the reports, um, as long as it is not an in-depth skill building exercise, it would be public awareness as long as it's general. But once it gets into skill building, you're going to want to put that underneath the training.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Perfect, and Jose please let us know if you need additional clarification. Uh, Keith gave a couple examples of public awareness activities he's doing. So a virtual abilities expo and posting on social media.

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Yeah, that's awesome, those are both excellent forms of public awareness activities and excellent forms within the environment that we find ourselves. With the COVID environment, it can be very um difficult to navigate the new normal. So that's excellent, thank you Keith.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: And that's it so far in the Q&A, but if folks do want to raise your hand, you're also able to do that and we can unmute you.

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: And so some of the things that I'll do when I'm leading up to a public awareness event is I get together any, any reuse items that I'm going to be taking with me, um, we will occasionally um uh, at AT Expos, not terribly relevant right now, um, but would put together things like we, we take magnifiers and pop sockets and such and we um, we distribute those as reuse items to individuals in the community. And so when I'm doing that, I put them inside a bag, I keep a count on it, and I write the count on the bag and at the end of the activity I know what I've taken with me and when I come back I can see how much is left over from that bag and subtract that total and I know exactly how many of that item I took to the activity to be able to record. Same thing with brochures. If you rubber band them in stacks of 25 or stacks of 50, and you take four rubber bands then you know that you took 100 or 200 brochures. And so whatever comes back, you subtract it and you know that that's how many you handed out. And it can also go a long way to figuring out how many people visited your table. It's not accurate, it's not 100% accurate. But unless you have one individual standing there with a ticker timer to tick off everybody who comes up and that's, they're dedicated to that job, there really is no way to know exactly how many people visited your table. So if anyone has any tips that they use when they do events, or when they're participating in a webinar perhaps as a panelist, and providing information, feel free to share this is a great place for us to be able to record that information for future use.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: And again, you can either raise your hand on Zoom or enter it into the Q&A box, um, but I'm not seeing any additional questions right now, Kathrine.

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Alright, well then we, in the future you can feel free to reach out to Ability Tools to discuss any new ideas if they're, if you're wanting to try out new options for participating in public awareness activities, maybe something you've heard about in this training or um, something else that you've heard about in other places, reach out and discuss it with us. And specifically reach out on the AT Advocate listserv, because your peers are there and whenever somebody puts something up there there's usually at least five or six responses. It's pretty active, and the people throughout this state are pretty outstanding and innovative in the work that they do. And so they're a valuable resource. I know that I reach out to you guys all the time to be able to get the support that I need to do my job.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Great, thank you so much Kathrine. So it looks like that's it for our presentation today, is that right?

>> KATHRINE CROWLEY: Yep, that should be it.

>> MEGAN COWDELL: Perfect, and this as Kathrine mentioned is a series we're trying to do, so look out for additional info on when our next webinar on the AT Act will be coming out. Uh, when you close out the webinar today there will be a Survey Monkey that will open up in your browser, please go ahead and take that to give us some quick feedback on today's presentation. And as always, please reach out to Kathrine or I if you need support. Um, and you can reach out to us individually or at info@abilitytools.org. I hope everyone stays safe and has a nice weekend, and we will look forward to working with you in the future. "