

Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs

Small Federal Investment – Large Benefits in Return



Assistive technology refers to any equipment used to maintain or improve the functionality of people with disabilities, allowing them to be more independent in recreation, education, employment and daily living activities.

All 50 states, 4 US territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, receive formula grant funding under the Assistive Technology (AT) Act of 2004. These 56 grantees are required to carry out a continuum of specified state level and state leadership activities that promote the ability of people with disabilities to know about, have access to and ultimately be better able to obtain assistive technology. These activities also deliver a large return on investment for the small amount of federal appropriation for this program.

Assistive Technology Demonstration Programs provide opportunities for people to learn about and become familiar with specific types of AT by comparing and contrasting the functions and features of devices through hands-on exploration. Instruction is provided by knowledgeable AT professionals in a product neutral environment that does not favor one company or manufacturer.

Device demonstrations result in informed decision making about AT that will or will not meet an individual's disability needs and prevents wasted expenditures on "mismatched" AT. For example, if an agency or individual explores 3 electronic print enlarging devices and decides that a device costing \$1,000 meets the individual's needs – they have potentially saved \$2,000 on the two devices that they would have purchased and rejected only to discover they were not a good match for the individual. Device demonstrations also save money by identifying less costly but equally effective alternatives including low tech options.

53,487 individuals participated in **40,456 device demonstrations** conducted by State AT Programs in FY11. Projecting a modest \$100 savings realized by even half of the total demonstrations conducted, resulted in national **savings of well over \$2 million.**

- In Oregon, a senior with macular degeneration participated in the State AT Program device demonstrations of various magnifiers and decided none were going to meet her reading needs. Then she tried an e-reader and knew that was the device for her. This demonstration saved her from expending an estimated \$4,800 on incorrectly purchasing devices she would have tried and ultimately rejected in favor of the e-reader.
- In Iowa, a nurse was unemployed after a stroke. She participated in the State AT Program device demonstrations and found that an iPad with speech generating software allowed her to communicate effectively. She went to an interview using her new AT and the employer was so impressed she was hired immediately – resulting in another taxpaying Iowan no longer needing public assistance.
- In North Carolina, a vocational rehabilitation (VR) client with vision loss participated in the State AT Program device demonstrations to identify AT that would allow the college student to keep up with a heavy reading workload. The student tried various magnifiers and identified the one that met his needs resulting in improved academic achievement. The demonstration saved VR an estimated \$6,219 by avoiding the purchase of AT that would not as effectively and efficiently meet the student's needs.
- In DC, an individual with multiple disabilities and his support staff participated in the State AT Program demonstrations of a range of communication devices. Based on the demonstrations, it was agreed that an iPod with communication applications was the best match for him and it was \$3,000 less than the more expensive option tried.

Assistive Technology Device Loan/Borrowing Programs allow individuals to borrow – for a limited time – devices for use at home, school, work, etc. Device loans allow borrowers to try devices in their own environments to determine if a device will meet their needs before a purchase is made. Device loans also can provide the loaner AT while a device is being repaired, while a consumer is waiting for funding approvals, or to use for training or professional development purposes.

Device loans result in informed and accurate AT purchasing decisions, especially in unique contexts like a classroom or workplace. When a school or employer can borrow a device and make sure it will allow the individual with a disability to be successful, they save money by avoiding "inappropriate" purchases. Device loans also allow individuals to remain functional while their device is being repaired, preventing costly loss of wages, lost school days or the need for increased community living supports.

33,823 device loans were made to individuals or agencies with **46,147 devices** borrowed from short-term device loan programs operated through State AT Programs in FY11. Using an average savings of \$1,000 per loan with more than one

device (at least one device was rejected as being a match and a second one was borrowed), results in national **savings of well over \$12 million**. Projecting a minimum \$10 per day rental fee for the average loan period of 35 days, results in national **savings of well over \$2 million** for devices borrowed for accommodation purposes, while a device is being repaired or while waiting for funding (e.g. these individuals did not have to rent the device for these purposes).

- In California, a senior with physical disabilities was in the hospital and unable to be released until his home was modified to accommodate his wheelchair. The State AT Program was able to loan sufficient AT devices to permit safe wheelchair use in the home, which allowed the senior to be discharged and saved significant expenditures associated with extra hospital stay.
- In New York, a mother who is deaf was in danger of having her newborn removed from custody because of concerns about her ability to safely care for the infant. The State AT Program was able to loan AT with visual alerts that alert the mom to her baby crying and other auditory signals. This allowed her to take the baby home, preserved the family and saved costs associated with out of home care for the infant.
- In Illinois, a school tried three high tech communication devices for a young student with cerebral palsy and identified the one that best met the student's needs. If they had purchased the two devices tried and determined inappropriate, they would have wasted \$16,805 before finding the appropriate device.
- In Oklahoma, the State AT Program loaned a variety of ergonomic AT devices on Oklahoma State University's campus to allow employees to try devices to identify those that would improve their productivity. These device loans helped the university avoid unnecessary spending, saving the university \$46,000 in devices tried and rejected. The device loans helped create a healthier and better working environment, in addition to, significant savings accrued from reduced lost work time, medical visits, therapy and insurance claims.

Assistive Technology Device Reutilization Programs support the reuse of AT that is no longer needed or used by its original owner. Recipients usually obtain equipment at significantly lower cost or no cost. There are several options for reutilization including reassignment/reuse, device exchange (typically online) and long-term device loans where the borrower keeps the device as long as needed.

Purchasing/obtaining reutilized devices saves agencies and individuals a significant amount of money when compared to buying new devices.

31,577 individuals received **38,616 reutilized devices** through State AT Programs in FY11. A total of **\$17,330,533** was saved by device recipients by purchasing/obtaining reutilized AT. In addition, well over half of the reuse-device recipients indicated they would not have been able to afford the AT if it were not for the reuse services of the State AT Program. The cost of those individuals being unable to work, learn or live in the community without the AT they need would be immeasurable.

- In Georgia and Alabama, reutilization programs in one fiscal year resulted in a savings of 3.76 times the amount of the total federal AT grant award for all their state AT activities. In Iowa, the reutilization program savings was 3.2 times the total AT grant award.
- In Kansas, the State AT Program operates a program reutilizing devices purchased by Medicaid that has saved that agency \$688,340 after program costs were recovered.
- In Wyoming, a preschool donated AT that was no longer used to be reutilized by the State AT Program. Within weeks, 19 devices were reassigned to preschoolers who otherwise would not have been able to afford such devices resulting in savings of \$3,138 to the recipients.
- In Pennsylvania, a nursing home resident was able to move into the community after acquiring a reutilized power wheelchair through the State AT Program. The consumer saved \$3,500 by acquiring reused AT, and much more was saved by eliminating residential costs.

State Financing Activities help individuals purchase/obtain AT through a variety of initiatives. Financial loan programs provide consumers with affordable, flexible borrowing options. Other programs provide AT directly to consumers at no cost, using dollars from non-AT Act sources or save consumers money when purchasing AT.

Purchasing/obtaining devices through state financing activities saves agencies and individuals a significant amount of money and may be the only option available to them. Without the program, they would go without the AT they need for work, school or community living.

773 individuals received financial loans totaling **\$7,002,327** to buy **788 devices** in FY11. These loans were made at an average interest rate of 3.88%. Assuming most standard loans would be at a 7% or higher interest rate, consumers have saved an **estimated \$500,000** through access to these flexible loans. **1,957 recipients** acquired **2,760 devices** from other state financing programs that directly provide AT using external funding sources. **2,006** recipients acquired **2,079** AT devices with a savings of **\$283,971** from other state financing activities, such as cooperative buying programs and device lease programs. The vast majority of individuals indicated that if the state financing activity they used was not available, they would not have been able to purchase/obtain the AT potentially resulting in individuals who are unable to successfully work, learn or live in the community.

- In Utah, \$7,347,359 has been loaned for the purchase of AT over the last decade, which is more than 3 times the original federal investment in that financial loan program.
- In South Dakota, renting equipment to address vision loss saved individuals with vision disabilities \$132,480 in one year, and allowed them to acquire AT devices they would have otherwise been unable to afford.
- In Pennsylvania, a family was preparing to move their mother out of her home because she could no longer use the phone effectively. Through the State AT Program, the senior was able to access an adaptive telephone that allowed her to call for help and remain in her own home.
- In Puerto Rico, the disabilities of a senior restricted her to a room lying face down in bed. She was unable to afford the \$12,000 cost of commercial AT that could provide her independence. The State AT Program designed and fabricated a power mobility system at a cost of \$700 (a price she could afford) that allowed her to leave her room for the first time in 15 years.

Leveraged Funding is frequently secured by State AT Programs and used to expand and maximize services. In FY11, State AT Programs **leveraged \$14,324,088** in funding from federal, state, local and private sources. These funds were used to support all of the State AT Program authorized activities.

- In Nevada, the State AT Program leveraged more than 3 times their AT Act federal grant award in state appropriations and private grants in one year, including funding to provide AT needed to support individuals with disabilities living in the community, rather than using more costly options, such as nursing homes.
- In Missouri, the State AT Program leveraged almost 3 times their federal grant award in one year, including funds to support the purchase of AT for children with special health care needs, allowing them to participate in the community and avoiding the use of costly residential facilities.
- In Illinois, the State AT Program leveraged more than 4 times their federal grant award in one year, including funds to provide quality assessments and technical assistance to IEP teams in schools. These services reduced conflict over which AT is “best” and helped avert a due process hearing (which can easily cost as much as \$100,000 to hold, not including the emotional toll on the family and school).

\$25.5 million FY11 federal investment in State AT Programs
\$34 million in savings and benefits described above for FY11
\$14 million in leveraged funding in FY11
Close to half a million individuals received direct services in FY11
• A GREAT RETURN ON INVESTMENT •