



**Family Center on  
Technology  
and Disability**

**FCTD Conference Series:  
Assistive Technology Funding**  
October 21 - November 27, 2002

# Assistive Technology Funding

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## EXPERT'S CORNER

- [Introduction \(pg. 2\)](#)
- [Expert Perspective \(pg .2\)](#)
- [Expert Bio \(pg. 4\)](#)

## CONFERENCE

- [Conference Transcript \(pg. 5-15\)](#)
- [Recommended Resources \(pg. 15\)](#)



*Hosted by Dr. Joey Wallace*

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## EXPERT'S CORNER

### Introduction

Assistive Technology enables children and adults with disabilities to be independent, self-confident, productive, and included in activities with their peers. Once the appropriate technology has been identified consumers, families, and professionals are faced with many obstacles including: identifying funding sources, meeting eligibility requirements, completing applications, and waiting for approval or, in some cases a denial. Success in locating funding sources often relies on your knowledge of the system and level of persistence.

Because of the many types of funding sources available, and explicit qualification requirements, we cannot prescribe specific funding strategies, rather we hope to provide a platform to discuss and share ideas for policy change and experiences (both good and bad) you have encountered in acquiring funding sources.

Dr. Wallace is dedicated to putting assistive technology into the hands of those who need it. We are pleased that he is able to spend the next several weeks helping us to answer questions and share ideas in the funding process.

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### Expert's Perspective

#### **Developing a successful funding strategy for acquiring assistive technology:**

The process of finding funding can be a challenging but necessary experience. As in all experiences no two will be alike, some will be quick and easy, while others may be confusing and frustrating. The process of finding funding for assistive technology will be easier if you are resourceful, flexible, persistent and informed. The following steps describe the process and gives helpful hints.

#### **Step 1: Define the need**

Start by being prepared, know what you need and why you need it.

## **Step 2: Document the need**

Prove you need the assistive technology by collecting information from professionals (i.e., speech therapists, physical therapists, rehabilitation engineers, etc.) that document your need. The documentation may include input from a combination of professionals, some or all of who may be willing to provide assistance throughout the request process.

## **Step 3: Identify the device or service needed**

Match your need with a specific device and/or service. Obtain written prescriptions or recommendations from professionals to substantiate the specific request. Find out prices of the device and service, and who can best provide it. As you look at prices and options be aware of alternative devices and services that you could use. Knowing alternatives can give you options with funding source later.

Remember, the right technology is crucial if it is to be used successfully after it is acquired.

## **Step 4: Determine if low or no cost alternatives are available**

Before applying for funding, investigate alternatives and options, For example would an adaptation suffice or could the device be borrowed from a loan closet or library?

Check to see if the same device or service is available at a lower cost. Also, determine if private insurance, Worker's Compensation or another type of insurance will cover the cost.

If there are no alternatives, have the facts well documented to show all options have been explored prior to applying for funding.

## **Step 5: Identify appropriate funding source(s)**

This guide will be a resource to you as you search for appropriate funding sources. Know if full or partial funding is needed and match your need to possible funding

Don't limit your options, keep a list of possible funding sources and decide where to start first. Get as much support and guidance as possible to ensure all funding options are identified.

## **Step 6: Submit a request to the funding source(s)**

Make contact with the funding source to determine what you need to do to submit a request. It is important to note there is no one specific method to assure success. Try to get as much information on the process and required paperwork before submitting the request.

It helps to find one person in the agency as a contact during the process. As you collect information and prepare the request, call your contact at the agency with questions and concerns. Making sure you understand now will save time and energy later. Keep a written record of all contacts with the agency.

Complete the application and send in all the needed information with the request, keeping copies of everything that is sent. Do not be surprised if a funding source asks for re-submission with additions and/or changes, particularly on a request for expensive items. Once the request is submitted and has met all the required criteria, the only thing to do is wait.

If notification or approval or denial of a request is not received within the indicated time frame a courtesy contact to the funding source may be advantageous.

### **Step 7: Authorization is received**

Your request for funding has been approved. Be sure to understand the exact amount of the authorization, along with the terms and processes for obtaining the requested device or service. Know if the funding source will purchase the device or provide the service directly or make arrangement with the vendor for the device or service.

If the full amount of funding is not approved, go to your list of other options to supplement the amount awarded. Other options to supplement the approved funding include the Virginia AT Loan Fund, personal or home equity loans or community philanthropic organizations.

### **Step 8: Appeal**

If your request is denied make contact with the funding source and be sure why it was denied. If the denial was due to a lack of information or a misunderstanding, appeal the decision. Get information on the appeal process, also determine legal options and processes and know when they may be appropriate to use.

### **Step 9: Go to your next funding option**

Don't give up. If you agree with the denial of your request go back to Step 4 and continue with the next funding source on your list.

The search for funding is not often quick or easy. Investigate and exhaust all possible options for funding.

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## **Expert's Bio**

Dr. Joey Wallace is a Policy Analyst and Funding Specialist with both the Virginia Institute on Developmental Disabilities and the Virginia Assistive Technology System. He has over 25 years of experience supporting individuals with disabilities and their families. Dr. Wallace has had a variety of work experiences including case management, residential services, advocacy, policy development and teaching. He has a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Maine and a Ph.D. from Virginia Commonwealth University. He is the author of multiple journal articles, textbook chapters, and topic papers on a variety of disability-related areas. Dr. Wallace is an individual dedicated to the provision of systems change and personal advocacy for all persons with disabilities. He has committed himself to the creation and development of assistive technology loan programs across the country.

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## CONFERENCE

### Transcript: Assistive Technology Funding

- **AT Funding - MODERATOR WELCOME MESSAGE by Dr. Joey Wallace**

Welcome to the discussion on AT funding. As you are well aware, funding of Assistive Technology remains the greatest area of unmet need for those seeking to acquire needed devices and services. The challenge remains great due to the ever decreasing resources available from 3rd party sources and the budget difficulties facing state and federal funding sources. It is my hope we can use this forum to brainstorm creative funding solutions, cite examples of successful outcomes, and identify system change initiatives that will improve individual access to AT. - Joey Wallace

- **Re: AT Funding by Janet Peters**

Dr. Wallace: Thank you so much for sharing your expertise on such an important topic. It's the question we most often get in our Center, "this stuff is great, but how do we pay for it?"

One question I received recently was a speech pathologist looking for funding for a young girl who will be moving back to Mexico, and so needs to be the "owner" of the device, rather than the school owning it. Do you have any strategies or resources?

The more general question is: should parents attempt other avenues of funding devices, so they can retain ownership in case they leave the state or school district? Thank you, Janet Peters

- **Re: AT Funding by Joey Wallace**

Janet: Great question. It is a fact that a school retains ownership of all devices they purchase even if they only pay a portion of the cost. I often suggest that families consider using personal insurance for device acquisition in the event it is necessary for other parts of a child's life beyond the classroom. If insurance proves not to be an option, considering other in-state funding sources such as loan financing for assistive technology should be considered. Contacting an assistive technology funding specialist in your state through the state Assistive Technology Project ([www.resna.org](http://www.resna.org)) should be of help also. School purchased technology often does not follow them when they change school districts or even schools within a district. - Joey Wallace

- **Re: AT Funding by Joan**

In Minnesota, if any part of Medical Assistance dollars are used to purchase a device and supplements the amount a school pays, the device is the property of the student. I know in some states the school will maintain ownership based on percentage paid, but MN has a clear directive regarding ownership by the student.

- **Why Is That? by Discussion Board Guest**

If the student maintains ownership of an AT device even if the school contributes money, would this cause the school to be less likely to contribute? Schools seem to be pretty tight-fisted with their technology funds and I have a hard time believing that schools would agree to contribute any amount if the device did not belong to them. It just doesn't make sense to me. Am I

missing something? – Perrine

- **Re: Why Is That? by Discussion Board Guest**

Perrine: If a device is medically necessary and included in the IEP, the school must pay for it. If the school can pay less as they will if paying the difference between what Medical Assistance will cover and the full price of the device, this becomes a win/win situation. The device, required by the IEP is provided. The school does not have to pay full price. This system is new in MN but appears to be working well. - Joan

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- **Director's Welcome by Jackie Hess**

Let me add my welcome to Dr. Wallace, our funding expert and to all those interested in this very important topic. As those who are or have been in the position of needing access to the vast array of assistive technology goods and services know, it all begins and ends with funding. Whether it's funding for the actual device or intervention, or for training of parents, students, and teachers, funding is critical to the equation. In this discussion, which will last until late November, you'll have the opportunity to share your own experiences, both successes and frustrations, and to pose questions to Dr. Wallace, who has worked specifically in the AT funding arena for years. I hope we'll hear from you often throughout the next month, and I hope you'll share this resource with colleagues and friends. If you experience technical difficulties during one of your visits here, please try again and know that we are working to keep disruptions to a minimum. Again, welcome to the discussion.

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- **Who Generally Provides Funding? by Kat**

In cases where students need assistive technology devices either in school to help them learn (tape recorders, carbon paper, etc.) or devices to help them get to school (wheelchairs, walkers, special vans that mechanically transport wheelchairs, etc.) who generally supplies these to the students? Does their insurance company pay for any of this? Or is it their parents who foot the bills?

- **Re: Who Generally Provides Funding? by Joey Wallace**

If the IEP team has determined that the device is necessary for the child to receive an appropriate education, they must provide the device to the child. Therefore this must be educationally related and necessary. The cost of the device becomes the responsibility of the school. In some states, inter-agency agreements exist between schools and the state Medicaid program whereby the cost can be shared, or Medicaid becomes the first payor if the child is a Medicaid participant. The school should not direct the family back to their personal insurance for an educationally necessary device.

Other devices, such as the mobility examples you have mentioned, are generally not provided by the school. The school is responsible for the child's transportation services back and forth only. Other resources need to be explored for the purchase of these types of devices and these vary state to state. Typically, private personal insurance or Medicaid will reimburse for these devices. Some states have Children's Specialty Services or Medicaid Waiver programs that provide these types of assistive technology. Very few funding sources provide payment for vehicles.

- **Re: Who Generally Provides Funding?** by **Discussion Board Guest**  
What can families expect from typical insurance companies regarding what kind of equipment they may cover and what percentage of cost they will expend?
- **Re: Who Generally Provides Funding?** by **Joan**  
It becomes a little cloudy when we talk about devices which are both educationally and medically necessary. I have encountered situations where families insist the school should provide a communication device- which to me is medically necessary and I believe should be covered through medical assistance or private insurance. I strongly advocate for inclusion of the device in the student's IEP, to assure it is used and supported appropriately. But, this is one example of an educationally necessary device which should be covered through Medical Assistance rather than school funds.

Something which is strictly educationally necessary (a portable note taker for example is generally not medically necessary) should certainly be the responsibility of the school.

- **Re: Who Generally Provides Funding?** by **Discussion Board Guest**  
What if the school pays for the device, but won't let the child take it home? But in order to do his homework he needs it.
  - **Re: Who Generally Provides Funding?** by **Joan**  
IDEA is fairly clear on a student's access to AT at home. The student's IEP team needs to make this decision. From IDEA- 300.308(b) "On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased assistive technology devices in a child's home or in other settings is required if the child's IEP team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive FAPE." As a parent, you are an integral part of the IEP team and should be involved in the discussion of what is educationally necessary. If you feel there has not been consideration of AT in the home or other setting for educational purposes, you have options for conciliation/mediation/complaint through the state education agency.

- **Federal Funding** by **Kari**  
What role does the federal government play in assisting people with disabilities to pay for assistive technology? Is there any current legislation to prevent the sunset of State Tech Act programs?

- **Re: Federal Funding** by **Joey Wallace**  
Two good questions.

Medicaid is a state and federal program for persons of very low income, and depending on an individual state's definition of Durable Medical Equipment a great deal of assistive technology might be covered. There are no specific direct federal programs that purchase assistive technology for individuals. The Tech Act, which is the federal legislation that funds state Technology Projects, also has a Title III provision which makes federal grant money available to individual states and territories on a competitive basis. The third round of this competition is expected early in 2003 and up to 36.9 million will be available. This initiative is directly tied to President Bush's New Freedom Initiative. These state loan financing programs can lend money at reduced interest rates to individuals or their families with extended

terms making the loan affordable. Contact RESNA at [www.resna.org](http://www.resna.org) for a listing of these programs.

There is a lot of effort at the present time to remove the sunset provision of the Tech Act. By doing so, the state Tech Projects that are scheduled for termination of funding, will continue at least through the upcoming Reauthorization of the Tech Act. The current of movement in Congress towards this end changes frequently. I will post the current status of the sunset provision after some further research. I will keep this listserv apprised as I receive updates. As you might expect, I have a personal and professional stake in this.

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- **Success Stories or Model Programs by Discussion Board Guest**

Hello. The information provided thus far in this discussion has been interesting and valuable. I wondered if you might be able to cite some specific examples or models of a child acquiring an appropriate AT via a funding vehicle outside of Medicaid. I am particularly interested in interagency collaborations that have worked effectively, private funding programs, etc. Also, any resources you could give would be very helpful i.e. website links, etc. Thank you!

- **Re: Success Stories or Model Programs by Discussion Board Guest**

As a new teacher in an urban school division with little funding for assistive technology, I found that I needed to go to outside sources for funds and equipment. My initial attempts at getting needed funding fell short, because I believe I was asking agencies and groups for monies without plans! I decided to create an assistive technology plan for my classroom and a list of needed equipment. I took this plan and list to several local groups and agencies, in my area, the Lions club, Kiwanis International and NASA, along with a couple of state agencies in my area. I was able to get five computers from a state agency that had just replaced their old computers. I was able to acquire switches and interfases from a group of men at NASA (they donated the money to buy these switches after hearing about my classes needs.) and I was able to get programs from the Lions club with no questions asked. (They sent me a package with several math and reading programs for the students!) I guess what this points to is the need to use community resources for acquisition! This may, in many cases, mean that the teacher themselves needs to seek these resources out and make the community aware of the need! Most people and organizations will be happy to help, but they have to know there is a need in the first place.

- **Re: Success Stories or Model Programs by Joey Wallace**

The primary traditional funding options for children needing AT are public school and Medicaid funding. There are examples of blended funding across these systems where the cost is shared when the child is eligible for both. Medicaid waiver programs also can be effective vehicles for AT funding for children but those programs are often disability specific (MR, Autism, Developmental Disability). Outside of these systems, one is looking at personal insurance, state based children's health programs, and private funding sources. In Virginia we have a Consumer Services Fund, funded by the General Assembly and serves as a fund of last resort and purchases much AT. Check to see if your state has such a program.

Private funding sources are identified based upon the individual or family's geographic location, specific disability issues, personal community contacts (such as service org's, faith based relationships) etc. I often explore these individually with the family or advocate. It is a good idea to connect with a community based

organization that would act on the family's behalf. Donations are often more likely to be received when an organization is asking rather than an individual. AT loan financing programs are also operating in 33 states and can be an affordable, expedient way to get the technology.

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- **Three Good Funding Web sites by Discussion Board Guest**

Here are three web sites with a variety of funding information. This is where I start when I need to give a family information on funding. Hope you find it useful. -Perrine

STAR: [http://www.admin.state.mn.us/assistivetechology/fund2/fund\\_dir.htm](http://www.admin.state.mn.us/assistivetechology/fund2/fund_dir.htm)

Neighborhood Legal Services: <http://www.nls.org/atart.htm>

Funding for Assistive Technology:

<http://www.geocities.com/eposk/assistivetechology/index.htm>

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- **AT Funding For Adults by Tom**

I have enjoyed the discussion about funding AT for school age children. What about someone who needs AT for college or work? What avenues can they pursue for their AT funding?

- **Re: AT Funding For Adults by Michael Moats**

In Ohio if it's work or college-related, we can go through the Rehab Services Commission / Bureau of Vocational Rehab. It's more difficult finding a group or agency that would help if it's not work-related. I just recently got some money from a grant to help some people get computer hardware and software.

- **Re: AT Funding For Adults by Joey Wallace**

The truth is funding streams for adults narrow dramatically once a persons leaves the public schools. The Rehabilitation Services agency is typically the next step but eligibility is tied to employment. An education plan post high school can be a part of the employment plan and although rules are different state to state, AT can be purchased to assist with educational and vocational endeavors. With any funding source, the approach has to be carefully directed toward their individual missions. Rehab - employment, Medicaid and personal insurance - health and safety, School systems - education. Create a convincing argument for the absolute necessity based upon the above and do not venture outside that argument. If denied: appeal, appeal, appeal.

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- **What If The School Can Not Provide For The Student? by Kelli**

What is the process if the school does not have the funding to support Assistive Technology outlined in a student's IEP? Does the school district pay to send the student out of town to another school who can provide the necessary aid and does that happen often?

- **Re: What If The School Can Not Provide For The Student? by Joan**

Districts cannot use budgetary reasons to deny services/devices included in an IEP. Although there have been instances where a district pays to have a student attend school in another school, this does not happen often, and I am personally not aware

of any instances related to AT. If a school sends the student to another district, the home district would need to pay for the services, which would include the use of appropriate AT- which would eliminate the reason to send the child to the new district.

If a district is not able to fulfill the obligations of the IEP, there are conciliation/complaint processes available to families to assist their child in receiving the educational services to which they are entitled.

- **Re: What If The School Can Not Provide For The Student?** by **Joey Wallace**  
The federal law IDEA states that if AT (which must be discussed at every IEP), is found to necessary to the child to receive an appropriate education, they must provide it. It does not say the must provide it only if they have the money. No child should ever be asked to leave their school because of lack of AT. That would seem discriminatory and I have not heard of it happening. I would not sign an IEP that did not include the AT in question. If it was included and not provided, I would call another IEP, and if no satisfaction, I would refuse to sign and call the Protection and Advocacy organization in my state, stating that my child was being denied their right to AT.

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- **Used Equipment** by **Discussion Board Guest**

Many devices are outgrown or no longer needed for a variety of reasons. Is there a way to find used equipment, either by a school or by a student/family? Are there restrictions to selling used equipment? Are there places where used equipment can be repaired, updated, or just cleaned up a bit? I know that, for example, Elder Quest repairs and upgrades used computers and perhaps there are other resources for assistive devices.

Certainly this would provide low cost equipment to more people and would also recycle outgrown equipment, as appropriate.

- **Re: Used Equipment** by **Joey Wallace**  
Many states have AT recycling programs typically connected through the state AT Act projects. Contact RESNA.org for a listing of state projects' websites for direct demonstration/recycling program contacts. Schools generally hang on to their equipment. Also state based disability listservs on the web can advertise devices needed or for sale. The AT Act projects should be of great benefit in this area.

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- **Funding Leading-Edge Technology** by **Jackie Hess**

What is the attitude of funding sources toward supporting the purchase of leading-edge AT devices? Are they more likely to support the "tried and true" over the "promising but less sure" option? Obviously high-end technology often costs more at the outset. Can parents make the case for a more expensive piece of equipment and if so, how?

- **Re: Funding Leading-Edge Technology** by **Joey Wallace**  
A good evaluation is the key to the entire process. This means identifying an experienced therapist or technology team that can provide a broad array of technology solutions from low tech to leading edge. The results of the evaluation should include multiple choices of devices that may be effective for the individual. The strengths and weaknesses of each device should be described in detail. Not surprisingly, you can expect the third party funding source to select the low cost device (if they approve one at all). It is sometimes possible to work directly with the

funding source or the individual vendor to pay the difference between the approved and desired device. If this is not an option, then appeal the decision of the funding source with additional justification from the physician, therapist, and others that can help make this case as persuasively as possible. Generally, funding sources approve devices they are familiar with and often are not inclined to make exceptions, possibly creating precedents. I often fall back on strong advocacy and building a convincing case

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- **School Funding For AT by Discussion Board Guest**

We have a nine year-old potential client who is 2 grades behind in reading. His mom demands a CCTV; the school says, "We just got something better for him last week, a Curr's wheel." Mom wants to file for due process LAST WEEK. Any words of wisdom?

- **Re: School Funding For AT by Joey Wallace**

It sounds like Mom and the School have their own "opinions" of what might be best but I'm not sure either is working from a position of clear evaluation based decision making. The school has the right to conduct an evaluation of its own to determine the technology needs of the child. If the school has conducted their own evaluation of the child's reading needs and is recommending a Kurzweil reader, Mom deserves an explanation and a description of the device. Mom can request an Independent Educational Evaluation (an outside opinion) which would be at the school's expense, if she does not agree with the school's evaluation. I would pursue this before going to due process. Mom should attempt to discover who best might provide the reading evaluation and request this person in writing to the school. That external evaluation will then be discussed at the IEP by the team, and a decision made on what to do next. If Mom still doesn't agree, it may be time for due process.

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- **AT - Lightwriter Funding by Discussion Board Guest**

I am a speech/language pathologist at NYU Medical Center. I am seeing a 17 year old non ambulatory patient with spastic cerebral palsy who is essentially nonverbal. I am trying to get her a high tech alternative augmentative system (Lightwriter) to communicate. She has the cognitive-language and visual-motor skills to use this device. She is from Mexico and will be returning shortly. She doesn't have Medicaid or insurance and I can't go through the Board of Education since they only lend these devices. I wonder if you could help me in terms of finding funding for this patient. Thank you for all your time.

- **Re: AT - Lightwriter Funding by Joey Wallace**

I need clarification on the Board of Education's limited responsibility here. If this individual is in special education and this device is deemed appropriate by the team, the school bears responsibility. If borrowing the device is the only option, I would act on that and depending on how long before she returns to Mexico, this may buy you some time while you pursue alternative funding. It may be possible to rent or lease the device allowing her to get it into her life quickly. With no other traditional funding sources available to her, then it may be that direct fundraising on her behalf would be the final option. The Assistive Technology Project in New York has a funding specialist, like myself who may know of additional resources or opportunities. Go to [www.resna.org](http://www.resna.org) and look them up there.

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- **PDA's by Discussion Board Guest**

Hello Dr. Wallace. My question is in reference to the use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) or Handheld computers for individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. Technology is advancing at an astounding rate and as it advances how do you envision these advancements as being used by people with disabilities? Are there funds available to assist individuals to obtain equipment and devices that use the newer technology? Will it cost thousands of dollars for the equipment and devices as in previous years? Thanks for taking the time to answer our questions.

- **Re: PDA's by Joey Wallace**

Excellent question. There are exciting developments occurring in the application of Personal Digital Assistants with individuals with disabilities. Look at these websites and published articles that demonstrate some cutting edge advances. Cerebreon is an organization that serves as the educational division of the International Brain Injury Association. They provide training in many areas, one specifically on "cognitive prosthetics". Visit them at [www.cerebreon.com](http://www.cerebreon.com)

Another resource is TechDis, which supports the higher education community in all aspects of technology and disabilities and/or learning difficulties. They are located in Great Britain and are working with PDA's and disability. Go to their website at [www.techdis.ac.uk](http://www.techdis.ac.uk) to read their new report: Accessibility and Personal Digital Assistants. The journal titled Mental Retardation just published an article titled, "Enhancing independent time-management skills of Individuals with mental retardation using a palmtop personal computer". I have more references if interested.

Much is happening and many of these technological solutions are quite affordable. They can range from watches with memory capabilities to simple organizers for under \$50 up to several hundred dollars. My organization is waiting to hear on a grant here in Virginia that will serve 50 individuals with autism or brain injury using these hand held devices over a three year period. Very exciting.

I believe this is the future for many individuals across disabilities. People with learning disabilities, memory problems, organizational skill deficits, and behavior stabilization issues. I see these solutions as affordable, dignified, and timely.

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- **Assistive Technology Loan Financing Programs by Joey Wallace**

I would like to throw this out as a funding alternative of importance for many Americans with disabilities. At present, there are 33 states with loan programs that provide reduced interest loans for assistive technology. These often can support technology acquisition for folks with limited or no credit, people struggling who may have credit but limited discretionary income after the bills are paid. It can also be a funding resource for those who are tired of approaching third party providers like education, Medicaid, personal insurance, rehabilitation, etc. Anybody interested?

- **Re: Assistive Technology Loan Financing Programs by Joan**

I think the low interest loans are particularly valuable for those who are not necessarily tired of approaching the traditional funders, but do not qualify for them. I am thinking of folks who do not work, for whom technology is neither educationally or medically necessary, etc. I wonder what are the typical technologies which are funded through this? I would bet it would benefit folks like my Dad, who is legally blind, but because of the limited funds through his state's services for the blind would not have access to items like a CCTV, which he will need soon.

Would the state tech acts be the appropriate source for learning if your state has a low interest loan program?

- **Re: Assistive Technology Loan Financing Programs by Joey Wallace**  
You are absolutely right, Joan. A CCTV is a perfect example of how a loan could help someone in a situation like your father. These programs are important for items not covered by traditional sources. I think what qualifies as medically or educationally necessary is narrowing all the time with respect to AT. Also think about recreational and leisure technology solutions that nobody will pay for. Also people who are in the middle class and are not covered by traditional funding programs or do not have personal insurance for some reason.

The research to date suggests most equipment requests for loans are for vans, lifts, hearing aids, home modifications and communication devices. These tend to be expensive and devices that have a high denial rate. Generally loans can be from \$500 up to \$10,000 and beyond. The state Tech Act projects are linked to these programs state to state and contact info can be gotten through [www.resna.org](http://www.resna.org).

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- **Purchasing Assistive Technology - 1 or 2? by Tiffany**

I am looking to gather information on pediatric wheelchair use. I was wondering, do you have any information regarding parents who purchase multiple wheelchairs for their disabled children? Is this a regular practice, or do most parents only purchase a single wheelchair for their youth? If you could provide me any information on this, or point me in the right direction, it would be a great help. Thank you.

- **Re: Purchasing Assistive Technology - 1 or 2? by Joey Wallace**

Parents have the right to pursue multiple purchases of wheelchairs for their children as they grow over the years. Many chairs are adjustable for growth but of course this can only go so far. Funding sources (Medicaid, personal insurance) want the child to get maximum use out of the current chair before purchasing a new one. There is no standard timeframe for replacement chairs. This is something that needs to be substantiated by the physician, PT, OT and other members of the team. Typically, a 5 year minimum timeframe for replacement of adult chairs is the norm. As you might guess, anticipating a child's growth as well as the delay in gaining approval are critical. I have heard many horror stories about denials and finally approval but the chair is too small by the time it comes in because the child has continued to grow. I suggest directing the parents to an OT/PT experienced in pediatric wheelchair evaluation, funding and acquisition. Working with someone who knows the system, its timeframes and requirements, appeal processes is the best hope for success.

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- **Wheelchair Van by Discussion Board Guest**

Hi! I am a 27 year old female, married, with a 7 year old son. I am desperately seeking sponsorship for a wheelchair van. My son needs me and I need to be there for him. I am in a power wheelchair and I cannot afford to purchase a van to be able to go to the doctor and take my son to school and other places (ball games, etc). I have Limb-Girdle muscular dystrophy. I was diagnosed on my 16th birthday. So, I have been dealing with it for 11 years. MDA helped with the purchase of my power wheelchair, but they do not provide any assistance in purchasing a van. I am searching for some funding options.

- **Re: Wheelchair Van by Joey Wallace**

My experience is that few if any organizations, agencies, etc. provide direct purchase of vans with lifts for individuals. This was a big reason for developing the reduced interest, extended loan programs I have talked about previously. If there is one in your state I suggest you contact them. If not, there is a national program called Access and Mobility Financing that assists in loans primarily for vans and lifts. If this sounds like an option you can call me at 800-552-5019 for more detail.

The next resort is fundraising which is absolutely an avenue of potential success. Approach this as a goal that may take a year or more to achieve. It involves connecting with groups in your community, getting organizations to take you and your son's situation on as a project. Vans with lifts can range from say \$5,000 up to \$35,000 and beyond. I suggest first identifying what you can afford, ruling the loan program in or out, and if not, developing a long range fundraising plan for the type of van that will meet your needs and that you can afford to insure and keep on the road. When you get to this point I would be happy to assist you in this plan.

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- **IEP by Kelli**

I know that the IEP is the first step in receiving funding for various devices, but what is the first step in obtaining the IEP? Is the IEP the only way to demonstrate the need for a particular device in order to get funding?

- **Re: IEP by Joey Wallace**

The process for obtaining an IEP for a child is solely dependent upon entry into special education. A referral for screening and evaluation is the first step in the process. A parent, teacher, or related services (OT, PT, etc) can initiate the referral and then a decision is made about the need for special education services. If so, an IEP team convenes to discuss the needs of the child. Assistive technology is required to be discussed at each IEP meeting.

If a child does meet special education criteria, it is possible to acquire needed devices through a 504 Plan. Request from the school a copy of their 504 plan which requires the school to provide accommodations to students/individuals because they receive federal funds and as a result must provide those to individuals if needed. An example would be an individual with good cognitive ability, but needs ramps to get around or other physical accommodations.

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- **Who Buys This Stuff? by Joey Wallace**

I have often thought that the average individual without a disability thinks that most assistive technology is provided by some third party funding source for the individual. This could be education, rehabilitation, private insurance, Medicaid/Medicare. The truth is most AT is purchased by the individual, often putting themselves, or some part of their life at risk. People may not be "clients" of anyone's due to income or choice. They may have no insurance. Their need for AT is not diminished. The majority of persons with disabilities go to their own pocket when they need something simply due to the importance these devices hold in an individual's life. This suggests a continuing need to develop alternative, non bureaucratic means to assist folks in the acquisition. Another plus for low interest loan financing programs, and specialized grant programs that make their decisions based upon individual choice, not last resort requirements.

- **Re: Who Buys This Stuff? by Joan**

Wow- some interesting and intriguing point! I have had some clients in the past who have made (in my opinion) some very bad choices for AT- (e.g. voice recognition software for someone with existing vocal strain issues) because the advertising and sales person were so convincing. I always tried to support self sufficiency and self determination for the folks with whom I worked, but occasionally had to ask them to slow down in a direction they had chosen till we learned more. But the safety issues are difficult- I have seen folks who have modified chairs or other mobility devices on their own, because they did not have the finances to pay for a professional job. This really raises the need for community information on alternatives for funding- beyond a client base or beyond a focused target audience. What are the responsibilities for what becomes marketing of program availability? I would certainly see this as something tech act programs should engage in, but it also would be important to have public service announcements on TV and radio, fliers in senior centers, etc. A big challenge!
- **Re: Who Buys This Stuff? by Joey Wallace**

You are absolutely right that marketing is at the heart of so much of this. Getting good information about services, evaluations, dos and don'ts, where to go, etc. As a Tech Act project staff person, I know what a challenge this is. These can be expensive and ongoing areas of community awareness that become more and more important as time goes on. Most Tech Projects have published materials on state resources and funding guides that are updated with regularity. As the Projects face 50% funding reductions and the sunset of the Tech Act, these marketing and public awareness activities will suffer and more creative dissemination techniques must be developed. Good point.
- **Re: Who Buys This Stuff? by Jackie Hess**

Given the demographics of the population of school-age children with disabilities, this will be a growing problem. Is there something that an organization like the Family Center can do to contribute to a solution? I found Joan's comments about the need to disseminate information interesting and wonder what we might do in that regard.
- **Re: Who Buys This Stuff? by Joey Wallace**

In some communities, organizations and foundations have dedicated funding exclusively to children in need of assistive technology. These are typically available to residents of that locality, county, etc. The purpose of the fund is to augment needs outside the school's area of responsibility and primarily support the children's home and community based AT needs.

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## Recommended Resources

**Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.** provides a booklet series on AT Funding. Check out the link at: <http://www.nls.org/booklets.htm>

**RESNA** has a comprehensive listing of Technical Assistance Projects across the country at <http://www.resna.org/taproject/index.html>

**The University of Wisconsin-Madison - TRACE Center** provides the Financing Assistive Technology: Handbook for Funding: <http://trace.wisc.edu/archive/fintech/fintech.html>

**Family Village** integrates information, resources, and communication opportunities on the Internet for persons with cognitive and other disabilities, for their families, and for those that

provide them services and support. They have a resource guide to AT Funding at:  
<http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/at/funding-at.html>

**ABLEDATA** is a federally funded project whose primary mission is to provide information on assistive technology and rehabilitation equipment available from domestic and international sources to consumers, organizations, professionals, and caregivers within the United States. You can find their Informed Consumer's Guide to Funding Assistive Technology at:  
<http://www.abledata.com/text2/funding.htm>