Technology and Disability Policy Highlights

May 2014

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# Overview

Dr. James White, Director of Communications Studies at Georgia Tech’s Center for Advanced Communications Policy (CACP) and Wireless RERC researcher, authored a National Council on Disability (NCD) report: *Effective Communication for People with Disabilities Before, During, and After Emergencies Evaluated.* The report, which was recently published and officially released at the NCD’s May 27th briefing, focuses on the accessibility of emergency communication for people with intellectual, sensory, psychiatric and developmental disabilities. Dr. White’s study focused on identifying barriers and best practices to assist in improving communication with people with disabilities during emergencies.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is requesting public input on how to improve federal hiring of people with disabilities. Under the current law, federal agencies are obligated to serve as model employers of people with disabilities, but there are no set rules they must follow by which to achieve this result. The EEOC has issued an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to gain public comment on the matter, requesting suggestions and/or comments. Also regarding employment of people with the disabilities, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has made nearly $15 million available for state workforce agencies in an attempt to “develop flexible and innovative strategies to increase the participation of people with disabilities in existing career pathways programs in the public workforce system.”

Click the headings below to link directly to a particular section.

[Regulatory Activities](#regulatoryactivities)

[Other Items of Interest](#otheritemsofinterest)

[Wireless RERC Updates](#wirelessrercupdates)

[Upcoming Events](#Upcomingevents)

# Regulatory Activities

## Law School Admissions Council Adopts Landmark Agreement to End Discrimination

May 14, 2014 – The Justice Department filed a joint motion consent decree in hopes of resolving allegations of widespread violations of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC). The decree would require the LCAS to pay “$7.73 million in penalties and damages to compensate well over 6,000 individuals nationwide who applied for testing accommodations on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) over the past five years.” Furthermore, the decree would mandate LSAC policy reforms and the removal of “flagging” procedures (i.e., indicating on students with disabilities’ test scores that they were accommodated with more time to complete tests.)

#### Additional Information

[Department of Justice](http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2014/May/14-crt-536.html)

[<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2014/May/14-crt-536.html>]

## EEOC Requests Input on Revisions to Section 501 of the Rehab Act

May 15, 2014 – The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is interested in revising the regulations implementing Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which directly “governs employment of individuals with disabilities by the federal government.” The EEOC is requesting public input on how to improve federal hiring of people with disabilities. Under the current law, federal agencies are obligated to serve as model employers of people with disabilities, but there are no set rules they must follow by which to achieve this result. The EEOC hopes to remedy this through the provision of specific rules that address topics such as employment goals, workplace accommodations, and hiring, retention and advancement practices. The EEOC has issued an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the matter, requesting suggestions and/or comments. The deadline to submit responses is Monday, July 14, 2014 by 5pm EDT.

#### Additional Information

[EEOC Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/05/15/2014-11233/the-federal-sectors-obligation-to-be-a-model-employer-of-individuals-with-disabilities)

[<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/05/15/2014-11233/the-federal-sectors-obligation-to-be-a-model-employer-of-individuals-with-disabilities>]

# Other Items of Interest

**World Usability Day Issues Call for Speakers**

The World Usability Day 2014, organized by Nomensa in Bristol, has issued a call for proposals. The conference is focused on encouraging “sharing, learning and networking within the digital community.” The event, to be held on November 13, 2014, is meant to be a celebration of the user experience. They are looking for “high-quality session proposals from experienced speakers on Information Architecture, UX and design.” The deadline for submissions is July 4, 2014. Details regarding the submission process can be found via the link below.

Additional Information

[World Usability Day Call for Speakers](http://www.nomensa.com/blog/2014/world-usability-day-call-for-speakers)

[<http://www.nomensa.com/blog/2014/world-usability-day-call-for-speakers>]

## Screaming Loud or Subtly Soft - App Alerts User of Sounds in the Environment

May 8, 2014 – The Tecnalia Centre for Applied Research has launched an app called MyEardroid. It. identifies “ordinary sounds that are produced in the home environment.” The app responds in real time to sounds around the individual by immediately analyzing the sound and showing an image and text on the smartphone. The most interesting feature of the app is the user’s ability to customize the sounds relevant to his/her surroundings, for example, a dripping faucet or a knock on the bedroom door. The app is currently available free of charge in the Google Play store.

#### Additional Information

[Tecnalia MyEardroid App](http://www.tecnalia.com/en/health/press-releases/tecnalia-launches-an-app-to-assist-the-hearing-impaired.htm)

[<http://www.tecnalia.com/en/health/press-releases/tecnalia-launches-an-app-to-assist-the-hearing-impaired.htm>]

## Atlas Service Link Brings Accessibility to Ernst & Young

May 12, 2014 – The corporate tax management consulting firm Atlas Service Link, LLC has joined Ernst & Young LLP’s United States firm and will offer “an integrated approach to enhancing tax data management, technology optimization and process re-engineering initiatives for multi-national companies.” Specifically, Atlas looks to advise “designing operational processes to improve the benefits of any technology suite.” Travis Fox, Senior Manager and co-founder of Atlas, seems to have a focus on making recommendations to Ernst & Young that would take people with disabilities into consideration. Fox stated, “Our comprehensive approach considers the client's specific and unique operating environment, including accessible technologies, such as ERP systems, consolidation systems and existing tax technologies in developing software selections, operational efficiency and functional integration recommendations.”

#### Additional Information

[Atlas Service Link joins Ernst & Young](http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/atlas-service-link-llc-joins-ey-in-the-us-258892311.html)

[<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/atlas-service-link-llc-joins-ey-in-the-us-258892311.html>]

## Virtual Town Hall on Accessibility and Universal Design

May 15, 2014 – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the National Council on Disability (NCD) held a virtual town hall online to open dialogue regarding the importance of accessibility/usability as it relates to technology and universal design in newer “workplace technology products.” The virtual town hall, "Advancing Accessibility and Inclusion in Social Media — The Tech Industry Perspective," took place from May 15th through May 30th. The topic for this discussion centered on ways that universal design could be utilized in social media development. Participants were asked to share their ideas and personal experiences regarding the topic.

#### Additional Information

[ODEP and NCD’s Virtual Town Hall](http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/odep/ODEP20140836.htm)

[<http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/odep/ODEP20140836.htm>]

## Department of Labor Offers $15M in Grants for Employment of People with Disabilities

May 27, 2014 – The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has made nearly $15 million available for state workforce agencies in an attempt to “develop flexible and innovative strategies to increase the participation of people with disabilities in existing career pathways programs in the public workforce system.” These grants are the fifth round of funds made available through the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) from the DOL’s Employment and Training Administration and the Office of Disability Employment Policy. The DEI, which has awarded in the range of $81 million to service people with disabilities through public workforce systems, aims to award at least one grant for projects focusing on adults with disabilities (18 and up), projects focusing on youth with disabilities (14-24) and projects focusing on individuals 14 years and older with significant disabilities. Eight different grants will likely be awarded and will range from $1.5 to $2.5 million for a 42 month span. To apply, please visit <http://www.grants.gov>. For details regarding the definition of “people with disabilities” for purposes of this funding, please visit the link below.

#### Additional Information

[DOL $15M in Grant Funding](http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/odep/ODEP20140834.htm)

[<http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/odep/ODEP20140834.htm>]

## AAPD and USBLN to Release Disability Equality Index Survey

May 29, 2014 – The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN) have announced the release of an online “benchmarking tool” that rates a company’s effectiveness regarding implementations of policies that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. The online tool, known formally as the Annual Disability Equality Index (DEI), was tested as a pilot in March 2014 with 48 Fortune 1000 companies. On June 26, 2014, AAPD and USBLN will be releasing survey questions about the DEI to the public in preparation for its first ever Annual DEI survey for Fortune 1000 companies. The survey will be available October 2014. Anyone interested in attending the public release for the DEI survey is required to register by June 19, 2014 at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DEI_Release>.

#### Additional Information

[DEI Benchmarking Tool](http://www.aapd.com/resources/press-room/press-releases/disability-equality-index-1.html)

[<http://www.aapd.com/resources/press-room/press-releases/disability-equality-index-1.html>]

# Wireless RERC Updates

## Wireless RERC Recommendations on Text-to-911 Rulemaking

May 5, 2014 – The Wireless RERC filed reply comments to the FCC’s *Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding Facilitating the Deployment of Text-to911* [11-153]; *Other Next Generation 911 Applications* [10-588]. In accord with Sprint’s comments, the Wireless RERC agreed that, while relay service providers perform a valuable role in providing telecommunications access for people with disabilities, within the context of 911 calls relay services are not ideal. TRS relies on a third party to convey information from the caller to the call taker and back again, adding time, which in an emergency is of the utmost importance. Based on its research findings, the Wireless RERC recommended a focus on mobile SMS and over the top text (OTT) messaging services as the interim NG911 solution, as both were identified as two of the most preferred methods for people with hearing and speech disabilities to contact emergency services. The comments provided are in favor of regulating the Carrier-NENA-APCP Agreement, so as to ensure consistent access to the service and regulatory parity amongst providers. If the FCC decides not to regulate, the Wireless RERC recommended that the FCC follow the model used with Wireless Emergency Alerts in that providers were required to formally elect to participate in the program, and upon election to participate rules concerning deployment became applicable. Please visit the link below to review the comments in their entirety.

#### Additional Information

[Wireless RERC Comments Regarding Text-to-911](http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7521110944)

[<http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7521110944>]

## Wireless RERC Researcher Authors NCD Report on Emergency Communications

May 27, 2014 – Dr. James White, Director of Communications Studies at Georgia Tech’s Center for Advanced Communications Policy (CACP) and Wireless RERC researcher, authored the recently published National Council on Disability (NCD) report: *Effective Communication for People with Disabilities Before, During, and After Emergencies Evaluated.* Officially released at their May 27th briefing, the report focuses on the accessibility of emergency communications for people with intellectual, sensory, psychiatric and developmental disabilities. Of note, Dr. White’s study outlined various barriers and best practices that would assist in providing effective communications for people with disabilities. “Examples of the communications challenges facing people with disabilities in emergency situations abound,” stated Dr. White. “People with disabilities can face challenges in physical mobility and receipt of critical, lifesaving information.” The report itself pulled from research that the Wireless RERC has been conducting since 2004.

Additional Information

[NCD Report](http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/05272014)

[<http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/05272014>]

**Wireless RERC Recommends ASL Translation of Emergency Messages**

May 28, 2014 – The Wireless RERC filed comments regarding Emergency Alert System (EAS) rules to Support Multilingual EAS and Emergency Information [EB Docket No. 04-296] corroborating the work of the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council (MMTC) in their efforts to increase access to emergency information for people whose native language is not English, specifically noting the need for the inclusion of American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a distinct language used by individuals of the deaf community and is fundamentally unlike English. Many deaf people are conversant only in ASL and have difficulty understanding written English. Currently, emergency alert messages are not accessible for deaf people that rely on ASL. This signifies that potentially millions of Americans are not adequately receiving, understanding, and reacting to emergency messages. There currently is a great need to provide these accessible messages for this population in the language they understand best.

Additional Information

[Wireless RERC Comments Regarding Multilingual EAS Messages](http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7521153082)

[<http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7521153082>]

# Upcoming Events

**Conference Concerning Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Conference of States Parties will hold its 7th session on June 12, 2014 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. The session discussions will include the following topics: “Incorporating the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provisions into the post-2015 development agenda; Youth with disabilities; and National implementation and monitoring.” The conference will cover committee membership elections, debates and topic specific roundtables. For further details and documents please see the link below.

Additional Information

[Conference of States Parties 7](http://globalaccessibilitynews.com/2014/05/12/7th-session-of-the-conference-of-states-parties-to-the-crpd/)[th](http://globalaccessibilitynews.com/2014/05/12/7th-session-of-the-conference-of-states-parties-to-the-crpd/) [Session](http://globalaccessibilitynews.com/2014/05/12/7th-session-of-the-conference-of-states-parties-to-the-crpd/)

[<http://globalaccessibilitynews.com/2014/05/12/7th-session-of-the-conference-of-states-parties-to-the-crpd>]

**National Federation of the Blind 2014 National Convention**

The National Federation of the Blind will hold its 2014 National Convention July 1-6, 2014 at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, Florida. During this annual convention, board members and national officers are elected; important decisions are made regarding the organization and next year’s policies. The conference typically sees an average attendance of around 3k attendees. Preregistration for the event is currently open.

Additional Information

[NFB Convention 2014](https://nfb.org/convention)

[<https://nfb.org/convention>]

**The International Summit on Accessibility: Making it Happen: From Intention to Action**

The International Summit on Accessibility will hold its 2014 summit July 12-15, 2014 at the Ottawa Convention Centre in Ottawa, Ontario. The Summit, hosted by Carleton University and the Province of Ontario, is centered around best practices, innovation and dialog/action focusing on accessibility and “inclusive communities.” This is an excellent opportunity to connect with influencers in the field of accessibility.

Additional Information

[International Summit on Accessibility 2014](http://carleton.ca/accessibilitysummit/)

[<http://carleton.ca/accessibilitysummit>]

## Effective Access Technology Conference 2014

The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) will hold its 2nd Annual Effective Access Technology Conference July 17-18, 2014 in Rochester, New York. The conference will focus on innovative solutions for barriers facing technology access for people with disabilities.

#### Additional Information

[Effective Access Technology Conference 2014](http://www.rit.edu/research/access/)

[<http://www.rit.edu/research/access/>]

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Technology and Disability Policy Highlights reports on national and local public policy events and recent wireless technological advances and political activities; and tracks emerging issues of interest to individuals with disabilities. *Technology and Disability Policy Highlights* is published monthly by the Wireless RERC. The Wireless RERC is a research center that promotes universal access to wireless technologies and explores their innovative applications in addressing the needs of people with disabilities. For more information on the Wireless RERC, please visit our web site at [<http://www.wirelessrerc.org>].

For further information on items summarized in this report, or if you have items of interest that you would like included in future editions, please contact this edition’s editors, Dave Stone[dave@cacp.gatech.edu], or Salimah LaForce [salimah.laforce@cacp.gatech.edu].

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