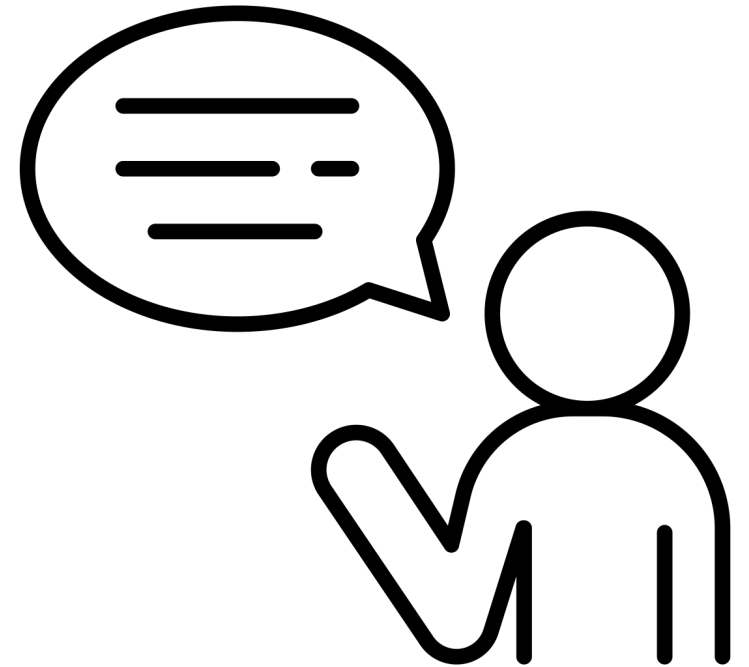

Finding & Funding AAC



PENNSYLVANIA
TECH ACCELERATOR

DISCLAIMERS

- We are speaking from the perspective of speech-language pathologists specializing in AAC.
- We will use a variety of identity-first & person-first language to accommodate both preferences.



ACRONYMS

- **AAC:** augmentative & alternative communication
- **AT:** assistive technology
- **DD:** developmental disability
- **ID:** intellectual disability
- **SGD:** speech-generating device
- **SLP:** speech-language pathologist (speech therapist)



WHAT IS AAC?

- **AAC** = Augmentative & Alternative Communication
 - **Augmentative:** adds to someone's speech
 - **Alternative:** used instead of speech
- Includes communication methods other than oral speaking/talking
 - Gestures
 - Facial expressions
 - Writing & drawing
 - Using pictures, symbols, etc.
 - Using a device
- We all use forms of AAC



FINDING AAC

5



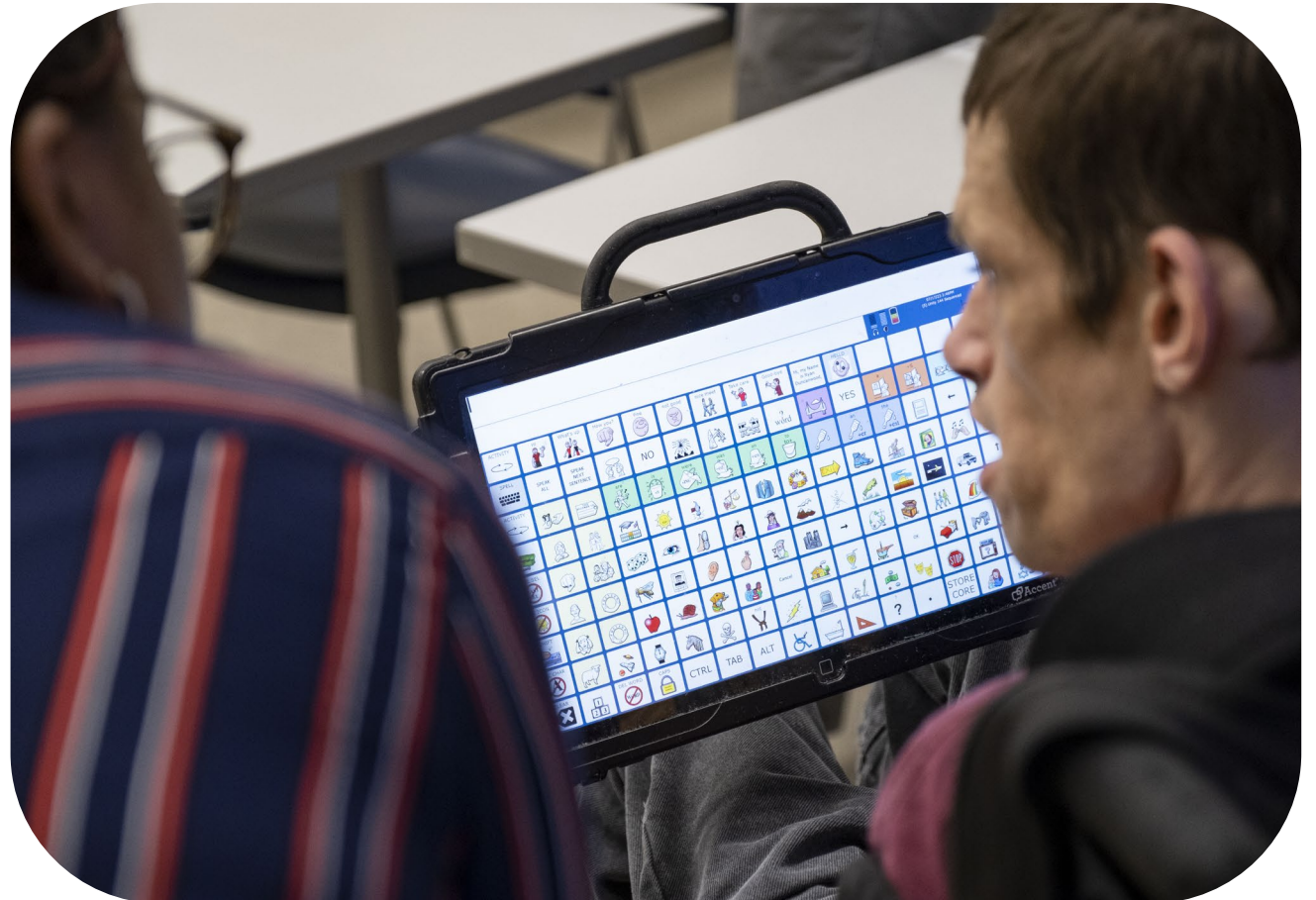
TERMS TO KNOW

- **DME:** durable medical equipment
- **Bundled iPad:** iPad with an AAC app funded through a specific vendor - often has a vendor-specific name
 - Ex: TalkPad Wego Edition, QuickTalker Freestyle, Choice Communicator
- **Dedicated Communication Device:** a device for communication only – typically funded through insurance
- **SGD:** speech-generating device

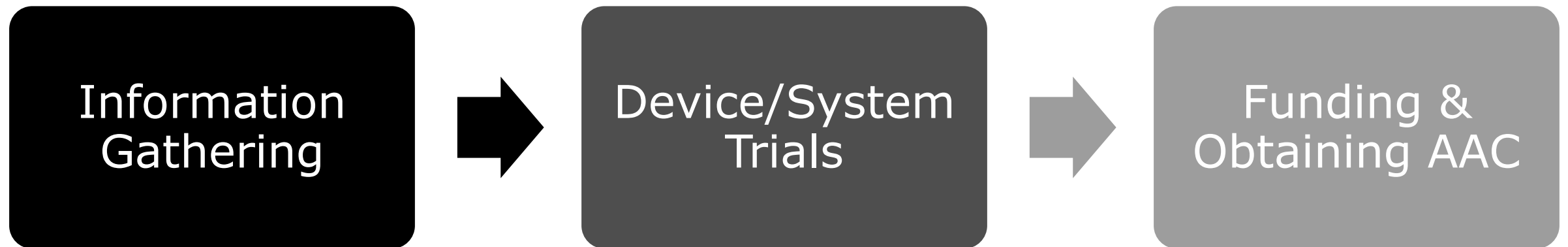


WHAT IS AN AAC EVALUATION?

- An evaluation to...
 - Identify communication modalities
 - Explore augmentative and/or alternative communication options
 - Systems, devices, & strategies
 - Find possible solutions
 - Identify features in a system/device the person needs
 - Determine the appropriate system/device
 - NOTE: a formal evaluation is needed for insurance to fund a speech-generating device



EVALUATION PROCESS



INFORMATION FOR THE EVALUATION

- Case history/background information
- Sensory, cognitive, motor (gross & fine), hearing, & vision status
- Communication information
 - How the person currently communicates
 - Communication partners & environments (who the person needs to communicate with & where they need to communicate)
 - Speech & language skills
- How the person will access the device/system
 - Are additional accessories needed?
 - Wheelchair mount?
 - Keyguard?
 - Switch
 - Eye gaze system?

DEVICE TRIALS: WHERE TO BORROW

- Short-term loans for decision-making
 - TechOWLpa.org (anyone in PA can borrow)
 - PaTTAN.net (for school districts)
- Device vendors may offer trials of their specific products

DEVICE TRIALS: WHAT TO DO

During trials...

- Provide access to AAC in all settings
- Model language throughout the day
- Take relevant data
 - How the device was used
 - Examples of what the person said with the device

Throughout trials...

- Customize the device as needed for motivation
- Support use of the device
- Share data with team

After trials...

- Meet as a team to discuss findings
- Decide next direction including funding options (or complete required steps for insurance funding)

FUNDING BASICS & OPTIONS



MEDICAL NECESSITY

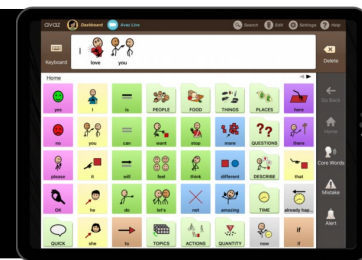
- Per Medicare: “Health-care services or supplies needed to diagnose, or treat an illness, injury, condition, disease, or its symptoms, and that meet accepted standards of medicine”
- Per UnitedHealthcare: “Based upon a foundation of evidence-based medicine, medical necessity is the process for determining benefit coverage and/or provider payment for services, tests or procedures that are medically appropriate and cost-effective for the individual member”

TALKING ABOUT DEVICES FOR INSURANCE FUNDING

AAC Devices

Dedicated AAC
system

iPad-based
system



Dedicated speech-
generating device



Bundled iPad



DEDICATED SPEECH-GENERATING DEVICES



PRC Accent



Grid Pad



Tobii i-Series



**NeuroNode
Triology**

BUNDLED IPADS



**QuickTalker
Freestyle**



PRC Via



**Tobii SC
Tablet**



**TalkPad Wego
Edition**

COST ESTIMATES

- Basic tablet-based speech-generating device: \$500-\$800
 - \$400 for an iPad
 - \$50 for a sturdy case
 - \$150-\$300+ for a robust AAC app
- Dedicated speech-generating device: \$1800-\$8000
 - Eye gaze devices: \$16,000+
- Additional costs for accessories & features



OVERVIEW OF FUNDING OPTIONS

- Waiver
- Insurance (private, supplemental)
- Medicaid, Medicare
- Through an employer (under ADA)
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
- Tricare (for dependents of veterans)
- School district through the IEP
- Educational settlement or post-secondary institution
- Grants
- Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF)
- Private pay, self-pay, or crowdsourcing



PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES

Early
intervention

Public
education
(through IEP)

Medicaid

CHIP

Medicare

Vocational
Rehabilitation

Waivers

Special
programs

PRIVATE FUNDING SOURCES

Private pay
(buy outright)

Use private
insurance

Private
foundations
or charities

Get a loan

Get used
equipment

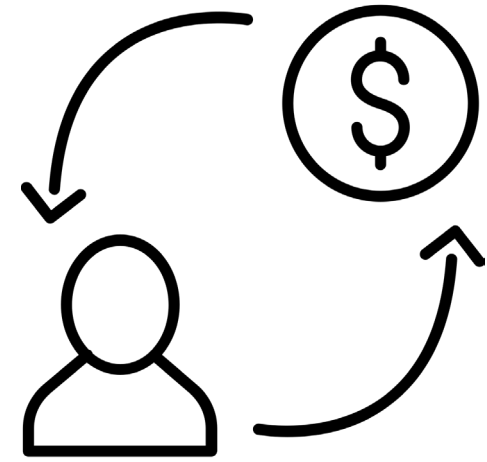
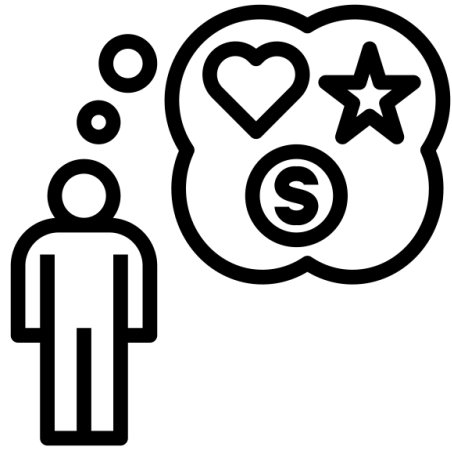
Crowd
funding

Get it made

GENERAL FUNDING PROCESS



STARTING THE FUNDING PROCESS

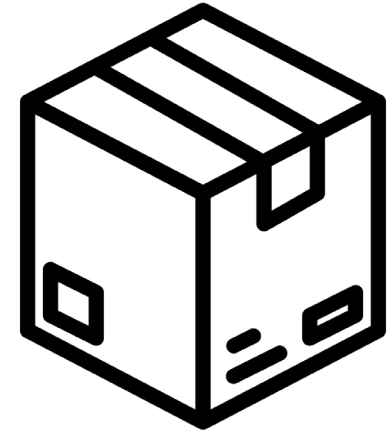
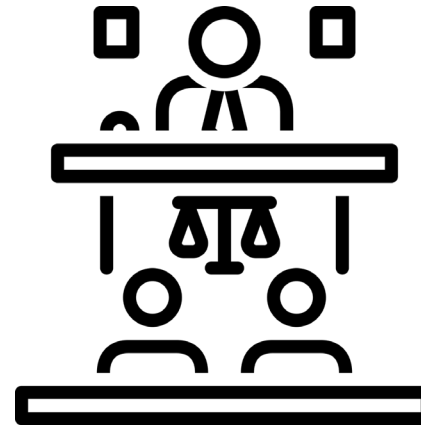
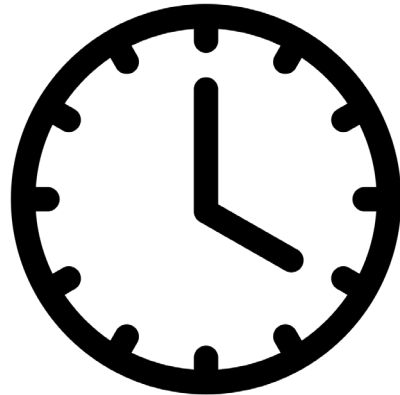


Know what a person
wants/needs

Know potential
funding sources

Match the
person to a
funding source

FUNDING PROCESS NEXT STEPS



Apply to
funding source

Wait

Appeal (if
needed)

Receive
device

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIFFERENT FUNDING OPTIONS



FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Questions to Ask

- What kind of school?
- Does the student have an IEP?
- Who will own the AT?
- Why is ownership important?



FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

Questions to Ask

- What kind of services does the child receive?
- What's in the child's IFSP?
- Are there family & natural supports?
- When is the child aging out of EI?



FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR WAIVERS (DISABILITY)

Questions to Ask

- What kind of waiver does the person have?
- What are the specifics of the waiver?
 - Is there a cap for AT/AAC?



INSURANCE FUNDING FOR AAC



GETTING READY TO REQUEST FUNDING

- Know what you need & be able to describe why
- Identify who can help with the consideration & funding processes
- Identify ALL potential funding sources
- Learn & follow rules/steps for applying
- Not all devices need to be acquired through insurance!



STARTING THE INSURANCE PROCESS

- Complete device trials as part of the evaluation
 - Can receive loan equipment for trial through vendors, TechOWL Lending Library, or PATTAN (school-age students)
- Gather documents
 - Insurance cards (front & back)
 - Doctor's script/Certificate of Medical Necessity
 - Assignment of Medical Benefits form
 - SLP insurance report
- The device vendor will take receipt of these documents & handle the submission
 - They will also help you edit the report for the greatest chances of success

SLP REPORT: INCLUDED CRITERIA

- Background information
- Communication information
 - Impairment type and severity
 - Anticipated course of impairment
 - Current communication skills (expressive and receptive language, speech, etc.)
- Comprehensive assessment
 - Vision, hearing, mobility, cognition, reading/literacy, etc.
 - Explain how these do/do not impact the person's ability to use a device
- Daily communication needs
- Ability to meet communication needs with non-speech-generating device treatment approaches
 - Explain how speech-language therapy, natural speech, light tech options alone are not sufficient

SLP REPORT: INCLUDED CRITERIA (CONTINUED)

- Rational for device selection
 - Input/output features and selection technique
 - Language system characteristics
 - Device features
 - Additional features and accessories
 - Recommended speech-generating device code
- Outcome of the device trials
- Final equipment recommendation
- Treatment plan and goals
- Physician involvement statement
- SLP assurance of financial independence
- Signature



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



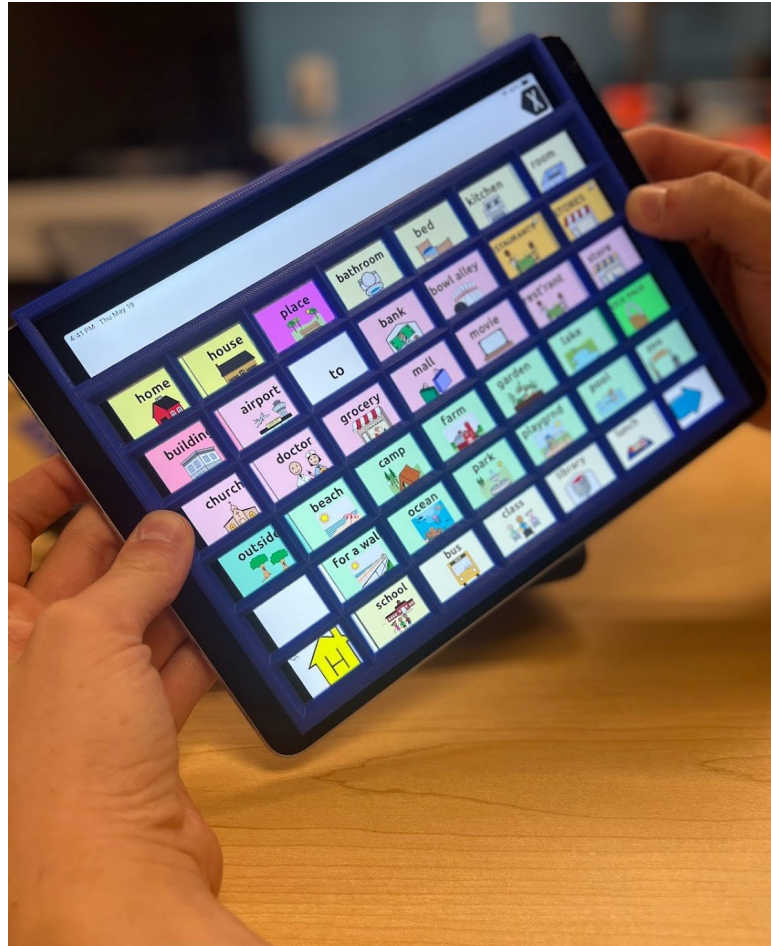
TECHOWL SPECIAL PROGRAMS

- At TechOWLpa.org:
 - Free Special Phone Program (TDDP)
 - iCanConnect
 - Fabrication – CreATe Together
 - Mini grant – Del Sordo Fund
 - Last resort → must have tried other options first
 - Reused equipment



3D PRINTING

- 3D printing @ TechOWL
- <https://techowlpa.org/3d-printing-at/>
 - Free keyguards for AAC devices



PATF

- Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation
- Low-interest & 0% interest financial loans for AT
- Information & assistance about possible funding resources
- <https://patf.us/>



TECHOWL AAC SERVICES

- Project contracts with:
 - Philadelphia Intellectual Disability Services & Early Intervention
 - Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (JustSO Speech Services)
- Free device demonstrations & video chats (informal consults)
- Augmentative Communication Empowerment & Supports (ACES)
- AACCommunity.net

ACES

- **Augmentative Communication Empowerment & Supports**
 - Program for young adult AAC users (18+)
 - Sunday, July 20-Friday, July 25, 2025
 - At Temple University in Philadelphia, PA
 - <https://techowlpa.org/aces/>



SOCIAL MEDIA



facebook.com/TechOWLPA



@TechOWLPA

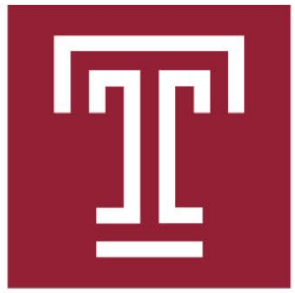


@TechOWLPA

TECHOWL CONTACT INFORMATION

- Phone: 800.204.7428
- Email: TechOWL@temple.edu
- Website: <https://TechOWLpa.org>





Temple University

Institute on Disabilities

College of Education and Human Development

Institute on Disabilities at Temple University
Ritter Annex 4, Room RA 430
1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Tel: 215-204-1356

Email: IOD@temple.edu

Website: <https://www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/>

<https://forms.office.com/r/unJmTEWEMR>

PLEASE
COMPLETE THIS
SURVEY!

Title: AAC Funding



**THANK YOU
FOR
ATTENDING!**

Hali Strickler, MA, CCC-SLP

hali.strickler@temple.edu

