Selecting Assistive Technology

For persons with a disability or those experiencing the effects of aging, assistive technology (AT) devices and services can be the key to greater independence and productivity. An assistive technology device is any item used to maintain or improve a person's functional capabilities. An assistive technology service is any service that helps an individual select, acquire or learn to use an assistive technology device.

Selecting assistive technology involves following a process which results in finding the “best fit” between person, environment and technology. Prospective end-users of AT devices and those assisting them must carefully gather and evaluate information and then make informed decisions. Employing a process for device selection decisions is important because it decreases the likelihood of bad decisions which waste time, money and patience. Poorly chosen equipment may be of little help to the user or even end up unused in a closet.

Considerations for Selecting Assistive Technology

Define Your Goal – What do you want the AT to accomplish?
What does the individual want the technology to enable them to do that they are currently limited in doing? This defines the critical “feature match” between the end-user and the technology.

Consider the AT Team
Selecting an AT device is a task which needs input from the individual who is acquiring the assistive technology. It may also require input from family members, educational, medical and vocational professionals, co-workers and caregivers. A good rule of thumb is to include anyone who frequently works with the end-user or the technology.

Remember, if funding is tied to educational objectives or medical diagnosis, there may be formal requirements that certain professionals be involved and certain documentation be obtained. Having the appropriate individuals on the AT team is vital to a successful outcome.

Consider the End-User
An assessment should include an accurate description of the individual’s abilities and limitations in sensory, cognitive and motor terms. It should specify what the person can do as well as indicate what assistance or accommodations are needed.

Consider the Environment
Will the technology enable the individual to achieve the desired functional goal in the environments where it is likely to be used? Who else will be interacting with that person and the technology in those environments?
Consider the Technology
If choices are available, what device, adaptation or system is the “best match” in light of the identified needs and environments for the individual with a disability or experiencing the effects of aging?

Device Factors to Consider:
Which device allows the greatest independence?

Is the device easy to use; does it require training prior to use? If training is required, where and how can one obtain it? What will it cost?

If the device is to be used in more than one setting, is it easy to transport from place to place?

Is the device reliable and durable? How does one go about getting it repaired should it breakdown? How difficult and time-consuming is it to obtain service on the device?

Does the device pose any safety risks to those that may work with it?

Is the end-user comfortable with the way that the technology looks, feels and sounds? Is it age, gender and culturally appropriate?

Considerations when Selecting a Vendor
It is not enough that a particular vendor sells a piece of equipment that an individual needs. The dealer’s consumer responsiveness, professionalism and service orientation should be a part of the decision process.

Questions to Ask the Vendor
How long has the vendor been in business?

Do they have knowledge about particular disabilities and equipment being sold? How was that knowledge gained?

Does the vendor stay up-to-date on new developments in both technology and rehabilitation? How?

How long has the vendor supplied the device you are interested in?

What is the vendor’s responsibility if errors occur in measuring, ordering, assembling or delivering the device?

Does the vendor provide training; for how long; at what cost? Can they refer you to other sources for training?
Does the vendor carry professional liability insurance?

Does the vendor have an ATP or an ATS credential?

Is the vendor willing to provide the names of previous customers using similar equipment as references?

**Questions to Ask Specific to Vendor Services**

Does the vendor have in-house service people and parts inventory adequate locally to service the device?

What is the average “turn-around” time for a repair?

Will the vendor provide a written estimate of cost and time for a repair?

Will the vendor make comparable equipment available for loan during a repair?

Does the vendor provide a warranty on service or customization of equipment?

**Consider Device Training Needs**

The arrival of a piece of equipment is not the end of the process. Both the end-user and anyone else who provides support in device use to that individual should receive appropriate training. This may be provided by the vendor, a representative of the manufacturer, a staff person from a medical or educational setting or an ATP or ATS credentialed individual. Training helps insure that the technology is used effectively, safely and consistently in all the relevant environments. Proper use and maintenance also minimizes the cost and inconvenience of breakdowns and repairs.

**Next Steps** - Selecting the right assistive technology can increase an individual’s independence and productivity, to get started call your state AT program; you will find the information regarding it on the back cover of this brochure.

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