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## **The 5-Year Plan**

by Tracy Rackensperger

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The Rehabilitation Research Center on Communication Enhancement, commonly referred to as the AAC-RERC, is a consortium of partners from around the country supporting the research, training, and dissemination of information relating to augmentative communication. The AAC-RERC is funded by the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to positively affect the lives of people who use AAC.

Recently, the AAC-RERC established activities to be conducted within the next five years regarding access. These activities fall into five major themes: improving the availability of AAC to a more diverse population, meeting the demands of users in today's society, enhancing AAC usability and performance, improving access methods to AAC technology, and promoting better compatibility of AAC and common technologies.

Improving the Availability of AAC to a More Diverse Population The complexity of AAC technologies may make it difficult for individuals who have a cognitive and/or language disability to use them. This is due to the high degree of learning required to become a proficient communicator. The AAC-RERC is carrying out several measures to address this issue. These projects include **Visual scene displays for beginning communicators** (Janice Light, Pennsylvania State University), **Visual scene displays for adults with aphasia** (David Beukelman, University of Nebraska; Jeff Higginbotham, University of Buffalo-New York), and **Visual scene displays and intelligent agents for persons with autism** (Howard Shane, Children's Hospital-Boston; Kevin Caves and Frank DeRuyter, Duke University).

Meeting the Demands of Users in Today's Society Individuals with significant communication disabilities have high expectations for their lives. Individuals must be properly supported in achieving their educational, career, and social goals. The AAC-RERC recognizes these needs and are conducting the following activities: **Literacy support technologies for individuals who rely on AAC** (Janice Light and David McNaughton, Pennsylvania State University), **Telework to improve employment outcomes for people who rely on AAC** (David McNaughton), **Specialized AAC vocabulary research** (Diane Bryen, Temple University), and **Enhancing the role of listeners in AAC interactions** (David Beukelman; Kevin Caves).

Enhancing AAC Usability and Performance The AAC-RERC recognizes that individuals who use AAC need to communicate quickly and efficiently when engaging in conversations. Thus, this need is being addressed through these projects: **Communication performance assessment: monitoring/simulating AAC** (Jeff Higginbotham) and **Improving interface performance efficiency between AAC and information technology systems** (Kevin Caves; Jeff Higginbotham).

Improving Access Methods to AAC Technology For many, improving the way communication devices could be utilized would make their lives easier. Individuals would be able to use their devices with less physical effort. To address this need, a number of ventures are being undertaken, including **AAC technology to supplement intelligibility of residual speech**

(David Beukelman; Kevin Caves), **Recognition of dysarthric speech** (Kevin Caves; Howard Shane; Diane Bryen), **Gesture recognition** (Kevin Caves; Howard Shane), and **Brain interface** (Kevin Caves and Frank DeRuyter; Jeff Higginbotham).

Promoting Compatibility of AAC and Common Technologies As mainstream technologies advance, individuals grow more dependent on them to be successful. People who use AAC must be able to use these common technologies in order to become a success and a part of the "global village". The AAC-RERC acknowledges this need and is addressing it by developing related activities. These activities include **Technology and policy watch** (Frank DeRuyter and Kevin Caves; Diane Bryen; David Beukelman; Howard Shane) and **AAC Webcrawling-communication content from the Internet** (Jeff Higginbotham)

For updates on individual projects, visit [www.aac-rerc.com](http://www.aac-rerc.com)

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