




Community Engagement

Over the course of the summer, our team has put its best efforts into connecting with the VIP community and securing public support for our project. We are pleased and fortunate to report that the cause for the invention of a Text-to-Braille assistive device has gotten overwhelming support from VIPs and VIP community leaders, organizations for blindness, and elected officials holding office. Below is a compilation of said support, its context, and what we learned as a team through such engagements.

Community Engagement Excel Sheet

 5a. Community Engagement Excel Sheet
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General Resources our team provides to community members and supporters

Project Brochure	 DOT Phamplet V2.pdf
Pre-written Letter of Support	 Letter of Support Template.pdf
Presentation Poster	 Optical_Braille_Device_Poster.pdf

Website

With the intent to keep those who have graciously given support for our project updated, we created a website to highlight our outreach efforts and the progression of device development.

Link to DOT website: https://users.wpi.edu/~sbodangi/InvenTeams/MassAcademy/home.html
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Support from Elected Officials

Representative Hannah Kane - MA State Rep. for 11th Worcester District


Through our virtual meeting with Representative Kane, we explained the need and purpose of our invention in the VIP community. She shared her belief for the cause, citing her personal experience with loved ones, and made herself available, not only just as a signature, but a resource for any future assistance we may need.

Letter of Support from Rep. Hannah Kane	 Rep._Kane_Letter_of_Support.pdf
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Senator Micheal Moore - MA State Sen. for 2nd Worcester District

In our virtual meeting with him, Senator Moore also expressed his support for our endeavor and made himself available in case of any need for assistance.

Letter of Support from Sen. Michael Moore

 Sen. _Moore_Letter_of_Support.pdf

Walkfit

Walkfit is a walking initiative, created by a Visually Impaired Person (VIP), Liz Myska, and an optometry student in 2015, that pairs sighted individuals with VIP or Blind people. Frequently throughout the year, Walkfit holds events where sighted individuals can come together with VIPs or Blind people to learn what navigating the world with visual impairments feels like. Our team got in contact with Walkfit through our school early last year and was able to communicate with VIPs regarding the challenges they face daily. At your first meeting, you are blindfolded and for a full two hours, you are guided by a sighted person. Though we will never be able to fully experience what it feels like to live with visual impairments or blindness, this experience of being blindfolded and navigating places like a busy hospital and an open park stuck with us. This experience is what first introduced to the world of disability technology and access to information for those with visual impairments.



Team member Derek was blindfolded in an activity to increase his understanding of how to navigate the world with a visual impairment or blindness.



Liz Myska, creator of Walkfit, strong advocate for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Liz Myska, one of the creators of Walkfit, an attorney, advocate for the VIP community, and a visually impaired person herself, has been a major supporter of our project since Spring of this year. We have met with her to receive feedback many times and she has provided us with many contacts and resources. Her letter of support is attached below.

Letter of Support from VIP Liz Myska	 Liz_Myska_Letter_of_Support.pdf
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Polar Park Community Outreach Event

On August 4th, 2024, our team was invited by Liz Myska to attend a baseball game at Worcester's Polar Park Stadium where various VIPs and organizations for the blind and visually impaired were to meet and spread the word about their work. We were invited to hold a booth for our team and present our idea while receiving feedback and support from the visually impaired and blind community. Notable among them was the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) and the Audio Journal. We used the opportunity to network and explain the intent of our project, but most importantly was to receive input from those who are visually impaired as to how we could make our device better curated to their needs. We received over 20 signatures from VIPs and VIP community affiliates in support of our invention.

Polar Park Community Support	 Polar Park Signatures.pdf  Polar Park Support Signatures
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DOT at Polar Park event promoting Text-to-Braille invention

Perkins School for the Blind, Howe Innovation Center

Our team also met with Perkins School For The Blind Sr. Manager of Innovation Programs @ Howe Innovation Center Kevin O'Reilly, who virtually discussed, not only the impact of our idea but the technical and entrepreneurial feasibility as well. He extended resources to our team and agreed to share contacts for potential clients and support.

Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI)

Our team met with Amy Ruel, a visually impaired individual, from MABVI on April 10th, 2024. Ms. Ruel gave us helpful insight into her day-to-day life as a visually impaired person, which we implemented in our brainstorming process. She discussed existing technology and applications she used, as well as the pros and cons of each technology. In addition to feedback on how to make our device truly aid the visually impaired community, she also gave us feedback on our existing prototype (as of 4/11/24).