

2020 Annual Report

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission



Becoming Racial Justice Allies

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Letter from the Chairperson

The cover of our report this year illustrates the new Massachusetts attire for those who venture beyond their home, which began in early March with the Governor's Stay at Home Executive Order due to the international COVID-19 pandemic. With the local and national protests, we heard the need to do more to stem the tide of racial injustice. Vocational Rehabilitation services continue amidst the pandemic and protests calling for an end to inequities. The Council began a conversation with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Director of Human Relations, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team and is following up with a conversation about the impact of race and disability specific to employment. We are committed to finding ways that will assist MRC staff and consumers to move forward in a safe and equitable environment. The Annual Report cover is an effort to acknowledge the COVID pandemic and racial injustice experienced by consumers. We recognize individuals with physical disabilities, who were served by MRC this year, are not represented.

Our Council, formed by a 1994 Gubernatorial Executive Order, calls for twenty-one (21) members. We are meeting that number gradually and are waiting on appointments of several already engaged people. The names and seats they represent are listed in this Annual Report. Our bylaws call for up to fifteen (15) ex-officio members. For those interested in being a part of the Council, an application is available online at the [State Rehabilitation Council \(SRC\) website](#). Meetings are open to the public and participation is encouraged.

Our meetings were held in person until March 2020, at which point we began meeting virtually via Zoom. The Council met 4 times: December, April, June and September. Committees worked on their respective Federal FY'20 recommendations as detailed in this report. An MRC staff person was assigned as a liaison to each Committee, ensuring the operational partnership between the Council and the MRC. The Executive Committee updated bylaws approved by the Council, developed a SRC Guidebook, and updated the online portal to submit applications for SRC and Ex Officio membership. We will be updating the website in the coming months.

In June 2020, the Council approved seven recommendations for MRC to consider and in September 2020 the Council reviewed MRC's response. These recommendations are reported here for review. The Committees had vigorous discussions about MRC's response. We were deliberate and firm with our recommendations in spite of COVID. We found a way to work together so employment services for people with disabilities move forward.

MRC continues to strengthen its leadership team, as identified as a Phase 1 priority in the MRC Roadmap. The Committees and Council were introduced to new MRC staff including the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Operations, Director of Human Relations, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Chief Officer, Director of Communications, and the Director of Individual and Family Engagement. The Council is eager to support new members of these leadership teams and have them get their feet under them so they can share their expertise with us.

We want to thank Deputy Commissioner Kathleen Biebel (MRC liaison), Commissioner Toni Wolf, and the other MRC staff members who have been crucial to the Council's work. I also thank my colleagues for their service on the Council and for their support.

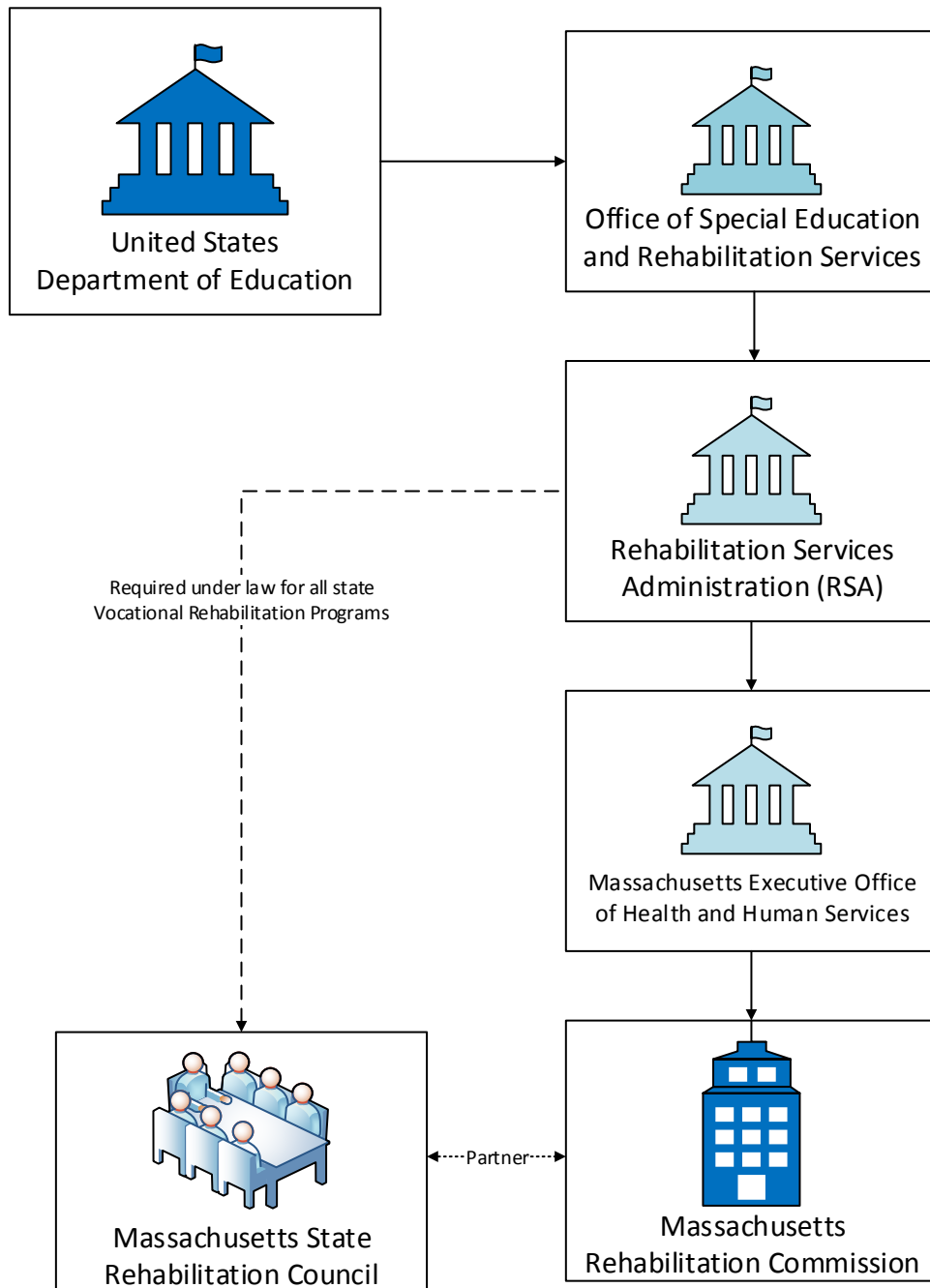
Once again, it has been my honor and pleasure to serve the Governor and the people of Massachusetts as we work together to provide employment services for our citizens with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

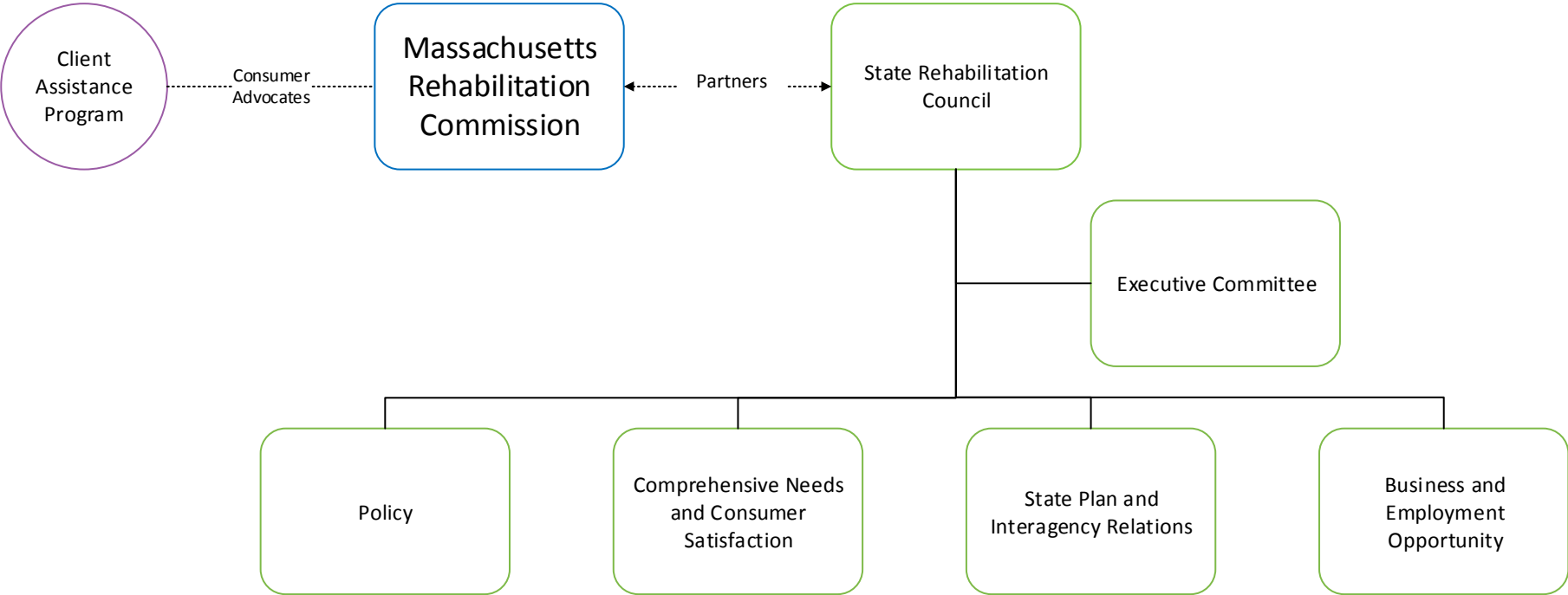
Dawn Clark

Dawn E. Clark, D. Min.
SRC Chairperson

Government Organizational Structure for Funding and Oversight



State Rehabilitation Council Organizational Structure



MA State Rehabilitation Council Members

Gubernatorial Appointed Members

Member	Seat
Rosanna Woodmansee	Business/Labor/Industries 1
Ellie Starr	Business/Labor/Industries 2
Barbara Cipriani	Business/Labor/Industries 3
Katherine O'Neil	Business/Labor/Industries 4
Vacant	Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Rep
Steve LaMaster	Community Rehab Services Provider Rep
Naomi Goldberg	Client Assistance Program (CAP)
Bonnie Jones	Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Rep
Dawn Clark	Disabilities Rep 1
Youcef J. Bellil	Disabilities Rep 2
Richard Colantonio	Disabilities Rep 3
Matthew Bander	Disabilities Rep 4
Lisa Chiango	Disabilities Rep 5
Heather Wood	Disabilities Rep 6
Inez Canada	Disabilities Rep 7
Christopher Dreher	Disabilities Rep 8
Olympia Stroud	Secondary Education Rep
Lusa Lo	Higher Education Rep
Vacant	Parent Training/Info Center Rep
Katherine Queally	Unserved/Underserved Rep 1
James Carnazza, MRC Salem	Ex-Officio Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Paula Euber, MRC Springfield	Ex-Officio Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

SRC Committees

Executive Committee

Chairperson: Dawn Clark

Mission: The Executive Committee ensures the Council acts in accordance with federal and state vocational rehabilitation regulations; manages the affairs of the Council in the interim between meetings; reviews the appointment categories the Council has vacant and maintains a list of potential candidates to fill the vacancies; and submits selected candidates for the following year to the Governor for consideration.

Past Fiscal Year Activities: : The Committee work of Fiscal Year (FY) 20 carried over the refinement of our mission and purpose and the recruitment of members and expanded to include succession planning, pivoting to confront the challenges of COVID-19, and fighting for racial justice.

Structure and Growth

During FY20, the under the guidance of the Committee, the SRC retooled its website, simplifying it and making it easier to navigate for end users. It completed the [Massachusetts Statewide Rehabilitation Council Guidebook](#) that gives new members an orientation and existing members a refresher course on the purpose, structure, and mechanisms that undergird the work of the Council. This resource relied heavily upon the template written by the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils. It will be an important reference as the Executive Committee continues the work of building a solid framework upon which the SRC can thrive.

Both the continued work of recruitment and the beginnings of succession planning draw inspiration from the guidebook. The Committee wrote a summary, [About the SRC](#), as a precursor to the guidebook. Individuals interested in the SRC can read that overview of the mission, membership requirements, meetings, mandates, and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) partnership; these key elements help an individual decide whether they would enjoy serving on the Council. Recruitment of individuals whose interests align with the mission and mandates of the SRC ensure that the Council continues the fruitful partnership with MRC that challenges the agency to grow its programs and services to meet the evolving needs of the individuals with disabilities seeking competitive integrated employment.

The Committee has started documenting its processes and procedures to flesh out the provisions in the Bylaws re: Officers, Ex-officio membership, and other general practices such that leadership and membership transitions are seamless. Further, process documentation will clarify roles, responsibilities, and parameters of carrying out the mandates of the Council. As we plan for the future, the Council has labored to finish the work of the past with the Autism recommendation and confront the present challenges of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and racial injustice.

Autism Recommendation

The Executive Committee worked with MRC to update strategies utilized in providing services to individuals on the Autism Spectrum. The Vocational Rehabilitation Director of Operations explained that MRC contracts with the Asperger/Autism Network (AANE) to provide staff and provider training re: Autism. MRC counselors/staff can contact AANE for technical guidance about best practices for working with clients on the Autism

Spectrum. Also, the contract allows individuals receiving MRC services to be referred to LifeMAP (Life Management Assistance Program), an individualized life coaching program that hones the practical skills of individuals with Asperger to help them become more independent. LifeMAP works with individuals until they are employed. The employment success rate is around 78% for individuals receiving MRC services with a LifeMAP component.

The Executive Committee concluded that MRC has provided the SRC with sufficient information concerning training opportunities for the counselors and partnerships with stakeholder agencies, both for the benefit of VR counselors and of individuals with Autism; therefore, the SRC will not carry this recommendation forward to FY2021. The SRC will continue working with MRC on implementation and improvement of staff training and initiatives re: Autism. For example, are there ways to make the trainings mandatory for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors?

COVID-19

In March of 2020, the Coronavirus (COVID-19), a highly contagious respiratory disease was classified as a pandemic and spurred an unprecedented shut down of the world. To slow the spread of COVID-19 in Massachusetts, the Governor instituted a Stay-at-Home Advisory for every resident that was not an emergency worker and a Travel Advisory counseling against both international and domestic movement. These measures required the SRC to adjust its meeting protocols and called for increased flexibility with accomplishing our tasks. The Attorney General relaxed the remote participation requirements for public bodies under the Open Meetings law in Massachusetts. With technical support from MRC, the SRC adjusted to virtual meetings on Zoom to check in with members and to prepare for a major shift in programs and services for individuals with disabilities seeking employment, especially for unserved and underserved communities of color disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Racial Justice

During this shift in priorities because of the pandemic, the SRC was forced to confront racial inequities that bubbled up after the murder of George Floyd, a black man, after a white police officer knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Mr. Floyd's death brought international attention to the prevalence of systemic racism in America and the protest demands of people of color and their allies that America take decisive action to eliminate racial injustice. The Executive Committee heard the impassioned plea of its members of color who called upon the Council to be unapologetic allies in promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This heightened awareness will never be enough; we need to make a lifelong commitment to stand with communities of color. This Committee will lead the SRC in acting on our conviction of the truth of racism in America. To our voice denouncing racial injustice we will add active conversations that seek to understand the impact of racial inequities in the context of employment and work with MRC to develop meaningful solutions that lead to robust employment opportunities for people of color living with disabilities. We honor George Floyd and countless other black victims whose lives were snuffed out as if they did not matter when we proclaim, "Black Lives Matter!" We stand with communities of color as allies in this call to action for racial justice.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Committee & Consumer Satisfaction Committee

Chairperson: Rich Colantonio

Mission: The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and Consumer Satisfaction Committee ensures consumer perspectives are included in the process of evaluating MRC VR services. MRC and SRC jointly conduct an annual needs assessment; resultant information and findings are incorporated into the MRC VR section of the Massachusetts WIOA Combined State Plan, MRC strategic planning efforts, and the agency's quality assurance activities. The Committee provides the agency with detailed information regarding the needs of the consumers served by MRC VR and fulfills the federal requirements that the agency and the SRC jointly conduct a needs assessment at least every three years. As part of this process, a Consumer Satisfaction Survey is sent annually to consumers with closed cases to gauge their satisfaction with MRC's VR services.

Past Fiscal Year Activities: In FY20 the Committee focused on two SRC recommendations. Specifically, 1) increasing consumer awareness of transportation options and exploring efforts to assist consumers with transportation; and 2) increased outreach to communities of ethnic and diverse backgrounds on vocational rehabilitation and other MRC service offerings, especially in Asian communities.

With the transportation recommendation, the committee held numerous meetings with representatives from Mass Mobility, a statewide resource dedicated to identifying and educating individuals of the Commonwealth on transportation options, including individuals living with disabilities. The Mass Mobility website was updated with MRC-specific information, and links and language were added that would be particularly relevant to those served by MRC. In addition, [Fact Sheets and Tips Sheets](#) regarding transportation were developed, targeting both our consumer base as well as MRC workforce. These are available on the MRC website.

With the Asian communities outreach recommendation, MRC staff began planning focus groups of providers in the South region of Massachusetts – specifically focusing on the Braintree and Boston VR offices – to better understand the barriers to service access and delivery for our consumers of Chinese and Vietnamese descent. Focus groups were interrupted due to COVID-19, and were not rescheduled.

For the upcoming fiscal year, we will have a new Chairperson for the Needs Assessment and Consumers Satisfaction Committee. Our vision for FY21 is to go deeper in the Consumer needs assessment survey questions. We will partner with MRC to identify and meet the needs of ALL consumers specially for People of Color facing day to day barriers that holds our consumers back from connecting to the services and resources provided by MRC. This creative thinking can lead to independence for People with Disabilities and encourage our consumers to know their value and worth in society by gaining and maintaining financial, sustainable living through employment.

Thinking with the lens of Equity, under the guidance of the chairperson, we would like to close the response gap, and low numbers for People of Color, who did not have access to computers and internet. We would like to move away from the surface and deepen our survey questions so that we will get to the root of the issues our consumers are facing. This will help us identify the needs of Consumers of Color with Disabilities and the barriers they face.

Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Chairperson: Joe Bellil

Mission: The SRC Business and Employment Opportunity Committee provides advice and guidance to the MRC on methods and best practices for employment and employment services.

Past Fiscal Year Activities: The Committee focused on the progress of their two assigned FY2020 recommendations.

The first recommendation was to increase and improve the quality of employment outcomes for MRC consumers. The Committee reviewed the self-employment manual, statistics and had discussions with MRC Staff on this matter. The Committee reviewed the Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) Contract Monitoring Policy, the evaluation report and provided feedback to MRC.

The second recommendation was to increase wages for consumers placed through job-driven training, hiring events, and On-the-Job Training (OJT). The committee reviewed employment outcome wage data from MRC, the top 20 employers hiring job seekers, and received information on OJT, job-driven training, and a glossary of terms. The committee members provided MRC with feedback.

COVID-19 presents both challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities seeking employment. On one hand, many people with disabilities work in frontline jobs. They are adjusting to work environments that mean increased exposure to the pandemic even though they are high risk. A number of these employees are navigating tricky reasonable accommodation requests that may mean they are unable to return to work. On the other hand, with employers transitioning to remote workplaces, the removal of barriers like commutes/transportation, air quality, or other concerns that arise for people with disabilities have been minimized. This shift will create new waves of employment prospects. This Committee will monitor unemployment rates for people with disabilities. Finally, it will work with MRC to identify chances to place individuals with disabilities in remote settings.

The Executive Committee has challenged each Committee to incorporate the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work. In addition to revising our FY21 recommendation re: increasing the number of state employees with disabilities, we will review our approach to our work to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are ingrained. Communities of color with disabilities who have been hit especially hard by the pandemic will face staggering unemployment rates as well. With workplaces going remote, these individuals are the least likely to have the technology and to know how to use it to obtain and/or maintain employment. We are committed to help MRC brainstorm and, if possible, implement initiatives to address inequities.

Policy Committee

Chairperson: Naomi Goldberg

Mission: The Policy Committee reviews and analyzes Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) policies and procedures to ensure service delivery aligns with federal and state VR regulations and policy guidance. The Committee recommends revisions to and the development of policies that help consumers better understand the VR process and what is necessary to attain competitive integrated employment. Also, it recommends changes to policies to fix systemic matters as appropriate. Finally, the Committee periodically reviews and recommends updates to the Council Bylaws.

Past Fiscal Year Activities: During FY20, the SRC Policy Committee wrapped up the review, comment and proposed edits on the written vocational rehabilitation (VR) policies MRC provided to the Committee for review; planned and began work on the assigned FY20 State Plan recommendations; and accepted the lead on one of the FY21 recommendations. Our membership has grown to include two vocational rehabilitation counselors, a former consumer, consumer advocates, a business/industry representative, and representatives from Department of Mental Health (DMH), Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). These diverse perspectives increase the quality of our work overall, add value on specific policies, and help the Committee see the effects of policies, procedures, and practices at different junctures of the consumer-vocational rehabilitation engagement.

Reviewing MRC Policies

The Committee established our priorities for reviewing and offering suggested revision on the MRC policies that govern service delivery to consumers. Our priority categories for review and feedback were policies and procedures addressing financials, eligibility, the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), and On-the-Job Evaluations/On-the-Job Trainings, respectively. The Committee noted areas where the policies were not consistent with the federal regulations and proposed alternative language. We also suggested clarifying language in policies and memos where the purposes or processes were not clear. For example, we recommended adding “advance in employment” as a key component from the VR regulations that was not in the IPE policy guidance from MRC. For counselors developing IPEs, adding this option gives them the opportunity to suggest careers beyond entry level employment to consumers. Also, we proposed emphasizing “informed choice” throughout the VR process. Finally, we noted policy gaps, i.e., places where MRC did not have a policy in place to address a matter the Committee deemed important to consumers, such as a clear statement on financial participation rights and obligations of VR consumers receiving SSI or SSDI benefits. The Policy Committee Chair has submitted the feedback to MRC. The agency has acknowledged receipt but has not given the Committee a substantive response regarding whether any of the suggestions will affect policy changes. Going forward, the Committee is hoping that the agency will invite us to formulate or review policies before they become final. We believe this is the required level of involvement for the SRC according to the federal regulations [See, [§361.16 \(a\)\(2\)\(iii\)](#)]. The same regulation calls for copies of Hearing Decisions. The work of getting those decision is ongoing.

FY20 Recommendations

In addition to calling MRC’s attention to policy gaps, this Committee discussed and began implementation of its strategy for the FY20 State Plan recommendations we undertook. One recommendation highlighted

service gaps (e.g., tutors, emergency ride sharing) and we will determine how we can solve this through the agency's procurement process. We have requested a list of vendors on the state contract and will partner with MRC to find businesses and service providers that are interested in becoming suppliers for the Commonwealth. Also, we plan to invite the Chief Financial Officer of MRC to a Committee meeting to help us better understand the procurement process so that we can focus the Committee's work on attainable goals. This recommendation has been revised to ensure that procurement gaps identified by the consumer surveys and by the Statewide Bilingual Group are incorporated and has been carried into FY21.

The second recommendation, adding a dedicated college liaison to MRC staff, was identified as unlikely because of funding constraints of the agency. The Committee regrouped and agreed to create a College Readiness Packet to support consumers pursuing post-secondary education and as a resource guide for the students and the counselors. The Committee brainstormed and compiled resources that could be helpful to both. Categories include academics, financial aid, disability services, reasonable accommodations, and campus and community resources. The Committee discovered that a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) in the Springfield Office had established the system we envisioned. Her materials contained 95% of the information the Committee was gathering. Instead of reinventing the wheel, we discussed how we could support replication of the VRC's system in other MRC Offices. The Policy Committee refined our final product using her materials and drafted a checklist, a FAQs on Disability Rights and Reasonable Accommodations, and formatted her list of financial aid resources. Once we draft a cover memo that explains how we see the College Readiness Packet being used, we will provide the packet to MRC in FY21.

Looking Ahead

The Policy Committee accepts the call to action on issues of racial inequity. Shortly before the close of FY20, George Floyd's murder and other injustices committed against black people received national attention. We briefly discussed the racial issues highlighted by George Floyd's murder in the Executive Committee. Therefore, in FY21, the Policy Committee will explore and execute concrete steps that we can take to challenge policies, procedures, and systemic practices that negatively affect minority populations receiving vocational rehabilitation services. We have started building relationships with the Statewide Bilingual Group and will collaborate with the other SRC Committees to identify what policies, procedures, and practices should be changed or stopped because of the unintended affect it may have on minority groups.

Finally, in addition to the work being carried over as described above, the Committee will lead the efforts on Recommendation FY21-2, Increasing online access to MRC and SRC materials, which involves developing a protocol for posting on the SRC website documents, reports and other materials necessary for participation on the SRC. More details about this recommendation as well as MRC's response is in the "Recommendations" section of this report.

Joint Committee State Plan Committee & Interagency Relations Committee

Chairperson: Joe Bellil

Mission: The mission of this Committee is to ensure the SRC meets its obligations regarding input from consumers in the development of both the MRC public VR State Plan and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan.

Past Fiscal Year Activities: The Committee reviewed the progress made with 2020 SRC Recommendations. Working with all the SRC Committees, the State Plan & Interagency Committee developed the 2021 SRC Recommendations timeline and process. The SRC Members approved six recommendations for 2021. Each recommendation has been assigned to an SRC Committee for its members to review and provide advice to MRC.

SRC members assisted in developing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan. Members reviewed and agreed to the state goals and priorities in the VR services portion of the Massachusetts (WIOA) Combined State Plan. This plan identifies the goals and priorities of the state in carrying out the VR program.

State Rehabilitation Council Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2021 with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Responses as of June 30, 2020

Recommendation FY21-1: Increasing the number of state employees with disabilities

For MRC and the SRC to work with The Commonwealth to implement ways to increase the number of people with disabilities who are state employees using the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. MRC is already working with the state on On the Job Evaluations /On the Job Trainings, internships and other activities. MRC may wish to restart the Independent Consumer Consultant (ICC) Program, increase its communications with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, promote hiring events for state agencies, promote MassHire with clients, etc.

Assigned to: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

MRC Response to FY21-1

MRC agrees that a high-level goal of “increasing the number of state employees with disabilities” is a worthy target. Working towards this goal requires a thoughtful and strategic response, which must align all parts of the Vocational Rehabilitation division and will likely need more than 1 year to accomplish. To fully accomplish this goal, there also needs to be a baseline understanding of current data and trends, which includes taking into consideration the impact of Covid-19. MRC proposes to amend the recommendation as such:

- Change recommendation to read, “Support employment of individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth through developing a baseline understanding of current data and trends, which can inform a high-level strategy to increase the numbers of state employees with disabilities.”
- We are aligned on including the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in this work, and suggest working with the MRC Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Officer/Team to ensure the robustness of this effort.
- We suggest the recommendation should focus on establishing a baseline of efforts/data including, but not limited to, number of individuals securing employment through OJE/OJTs, internships; data from hiring events, etc.
- We suggest the recommendation could include, after analysis of aforementioned data and trends, developing a high-level strategy for the agency.
- We suggest including efforts to explore partnerships with other disability serving agencies (e.g., MCB) to work together towards this goal – more power in numbers.
- MRC is not restarting the Independent Consumer Consultant Program – we have formed the Office of Individual and Family Engagement, and are focusing our efforts on high level strategies to include consumer voice in our work, across the entire agency, to increase impact. We ask that this is removed from the recommendation.
- We are unclear of the intent, specific to this goal, of “increase its communications with EOHHS” and request this is either clarified or removed.

Recommendation FY21-2: Increasing online access to MRC and SRC materials

To help new members and interested persons in the public acclimate to the SRC activities, MRC and the SRC should develop and make available a protocol for posting and should post all SRC documents, reports and other materials necessary for participation in any upcoming SRC meeting on the SRC website.

Assigned to: Business & Employment Committee

MRC Response to FY21-2

MRC absolutely agrees there is more work to be done in increasing the online availability and accessibility of SRC materials. MRC would like to acknowledge there has been great effort by the SRC in FY20 to create and/or revise “foundational tools” (e.g., SRC by-laws, officer descriptions), which will be helpful in addressing this recommendation in FY21. MRC proposes to amend the recommendation as such:

- Change recommendation to read, “Increase availability and accessibility of SRC materials online.” The change makes clear the recommendation is specifically about SRC materials.
- MRC would like more clarification as to what is meant by, “develop and make available a protocol for posting.”
- MRC proposes that our new Director of Communications (hiring in process) can work with the SRC on this recommendation.
- MRC suggest the recommendation include as an action step a process to determine what documents and information are a priority for the SRC.
- MRC proposes this recommendation be combined with Recommendation FY21-6.

Recommendation FY21-3: MRC will engage in procurements and contracts to provide services to consumers

MRC should educate the SRC on the procurement process to promote transparency around: determinations of which consumer services MRC procures; the alignment of those services with consumer needs identified in Consumer Needs/ Satisfaction Survey results or by Area Offices/Counselors; strategies used to address barriers to procurement; and the process for handling time sensitive services needs when there is no state contract in place. In order for SRC to partner with MRC to fill the procurement service gaps, the SRC requests quarterly reports from MRC to the Policy Committee showing the broad categories of procurement services (e.g., tutors, transportation, CRP) and goods (e.g., AT, furniture, books); how they match the survey results, including no matches/gaps; and concrete steps MRC has taken to close the gaps.

Assigned to: Policy Committee

MRC Response to FY21-3

MRC agrees to the importance of the SRC having a clear understanding of the contracting and procurement process within the agency. MRC proposes to amend the recommendation as such:

- Change recommendation to read, “Increase the SRC’s understanding and knowledge of MRC procurement and contracting processes.”
- MRC proposes this work is done in partnership with our Office of Finance, Management and Budget (OFMB), VR field leadership, and our Department of Analytics and Quality Assurance (AQuA).

- MRC proposes to work with the Policy Committee to identify which reports and what data will be most useful in meeting this recommendation. Reports and data may include, but are not limited to, current procured services and contracts; VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey; Relevant consultant reports.

Recommendation FY21-4: College Liaisons increasing post-secondary training outcomes

To increase post-secondary training outcomes, MRC should standardize its process for orienting consumers with post-secondary training services in their Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs). MRC should provide written information on navigating basic college processes and rights, especially those unique to people with disabilities. MRC should draft a standard checklist that counselors will use with consumers in post-secondary training to document and ensure the consumer's connection with services (financial aid, Disability Services); campus supports (academic advising, tutoring, social clubs); and community resources (food pantries, medical providers).

Assigned to: Policy Committee

MRC Response to FY21-4

MRC agrees to the importance of providing consistent practice in the preparation of students in post-secondary education settings, to ensure students have the supports needed to successfully pursue their educational goals. MRC proposes to amend the recommendation as such:

- Change recommendation to read, "Develop standardized VR workforce strategies to prepare and support students entering post-secondary educational settings."
- MRC supports the strategy of a standardized check list for counselors to use when working with students in or preparing to enroll in post-secondary education.
- MRC suggests partnering with experts in this field to do this work, such as the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research, housed at the UMass Medical School.

Recommendation FY21-5: Update and make more user-friendly all self-employment resources materials

The SRC will work with MRC to update the current self-employment manual and make it more user friendly. The SRC would also like to review self-employment related reports and materials to identify trends in order to recommend changes to increase consumer awareness of and success in self-employment.

Assigned to: Business & Employment Committee

MRC Response to FY21-5

MRC acknowledges its current self-employment resources are out of date. MRC also notes that "self-employment" accounts for a very low number of placements within VR (approximately 7 in FY19), and there are robust self-employment guides and resources available through other VR agencies across the country, as well as through the VR technical assistance centers (e.g., WINTAC). MRC does not feel there is sufficient value added to focusing resources on this recommendation. As such, MRC does not support this recommendation.

Recommendation FY21-6: Review and update the website, social media, other marketing efforts and technologies

The SRC recommends that the MRC ensures there is a concerted focus on making the website and all associated tools needed to search for job opportunities user-friendly for consumers seeking jobs as well as user-friendly for potential employers seeking candidates.

The SRC also recommends that there be a marketing and outreach effort to potential employers so that they see MRC as a resource for finding employees. This would include increasing social media, web and other marketing resources to recruit employers while continuing active involvement with employment boards, job fairs, virtual hiring events, etc.

The MRC should work with Assistive Technology partners in government and in non-profits to address the “digital disparity” with consumers by equipping them with the technology and resources to research, interview and perform employment-related tasks digitally, as needed. MRC should collaborate with its workforce partners to provide educational resources to train and prepare staff, consumers and employers to communicate and work using various technology mediums.

Assigned to: Business & Employment and the Statewide Needs Assessment Committee & Consumer Satisfaction Committees

MRC Response to FY21-6

MRC is committed having a robust, accessible, and up to date technology platform and marketing strategy to support the work of the agency. We are aligned with highlighting employers and businesses as key targets in this work and agree that recruitment of these stakeholders is critical. While we acknowledge the importance of Assistive Technology partners, we assert this work is distinct from a communications, marketing, and branding strategy. MRC proposes to amend the recommendation as such:

- Change recommendation to read, “Develop a robust communications, marketing, and branding strategy for MRC.”
- MRC proposes “targets” of efforts are expanded to include employers, businesses, workforce partners, consumers, family members, providers, sister agencies, and the general public.
- MRC proposes any strategy will include sharing of data from MRC that are accessible and understandable to all audiences.
- MRC proposes that our new Director of Communications (hiring in process) can work with the SRC on this recommendation.
- MRC proposes to remove the focus on Assistive Technology from the recommendation.
- MRC proposes this recommendation be combined with Recommendation FY21-2.

Final MRC Note Regarding Recommendations

MRC will work closely with the SRC to establish a work plan to track progress on the recommendations and associated steps related to the recommendations.

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Agency Overview



Mission:

The MRC promotes equality, empowerment, and independence of individuals with disabilities. These goals are achieved through enhancing and encouraging personal choice and the right to succeed or fail in the pursuit of independence and employment in the community.

Vision:

The MRC provides comprehensive services to people with disabilities that maximize their quality of life and economic self-sufficiency in the community.

State Leadership:

Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn Polito
Lt. Governor

Marylou Sudders
*Secretary of Health
and Human Services*

Toni Wolf
Commissioner

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Accomplishments

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program assists individuals with physical, psychiatric, and/or learning disabilities in facing the challenges of the modern workplace. This may include identifying job goals based on individual interests and aptitudes, providing funds for college and vocational training, assessing work site accommodations, educating an employer about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or assisting an individual returning to work. Vocational Rehabilitation services can reduce or remove barriers to employment. Priority is given to those individuals who have the most significant disabilities in areas such as communication, learning disabilities, mobility, work tolerance, and work skills.

VR Year in Review

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Consumers actively receiving services:	27,028	29,463	24,991	22,540
Consumers enrolled in training/education programs:	17,685	18,471	13,174	12,868
Consumers with disabilities competitively employed:	3,973	4,053	3,695	3,042
Consumers employed with medical insurance:	96.6%	98.7%	99.0%	99.4%
Consumers satisfied with services:	86.0%	88.0%	78.0%	78.0%
Average age of consumer:	32.4	31.8	31.0	31.0
Average hourly wage:	\$14.11	\$14.65	\$14.69	\$15.45
Average work hours weekly:	26.7	27.3	27.4	27.4

Services for Transition-Aged Youth and Young Adults

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) mandates that 15% of all federal grants be spent on services for youth.

- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program served 9,001 youth and young adults aged 14 to 24 during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020
- 897 of these consumers became employed, with an average hourly wage of \$13.54
- Employed young consumers worked an average of 26.5 hours per week.
- MRC served 4,887 high school and post-secondary education students with disabilities aged 14 to 22 through its VR Area Offices during SFY2020.
- In SFY2020, MRC also operated Pre-Employment Transition Service (Pre-ETS) contracts with 36 vendors across the Commonwealth serving 2,301 VR eligible and potentially eligible students. These programs offer work-based learning experiences, job readiness and skills trainings, assistance with enrollment in post-secondary education and training programs, job exploration, and leadership/mentoring services to students with disabilities.

Join the MA State Rehab Council

Make a difference in the world of disability employment!

The Massachusetts SRC provides individuals with disabilities and representatives from the community with a voice in the state's vocational rehabilitation program. We partner with MRC to realize the goal of "empowering individuals with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion and integration into society."

Click [join](#) if you are interested in the unique opportunity the SRC offers a person to use their talents and skills to influence and innovate the state's vocational rehabilitation service delivery.

Send an email to: MRC.StateRehabCouncil@MassMail.State.MA.US

We want to hear YOUR voice!

We need YOUR help!

MRC Mission:

The primary goal of the SRC is to partner with MRC to ensure that people with disabilities are provided with an equal opportunity to receive the programs, services and supports needed to gain competitive integrated employment. The SRC provides a forum for consumer input resulting in recommendations and advice to the agency. We aim to provide a path to high quality, value-based, vocational rehabilitation services that lead to meaningful, sustainable, and competitive employment for consumers with disabilities.

SRC Vision:

Our vision is to break the historic bonds of poverty by providing a dynamic pathway to economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

Read more about the [SRC](#)

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