

## **Draft - Committee Reports for 2022 SRC Annual Report**

### **Business & Employment**

#### **Opportunity Committee**

**Chairperson: Steve LaMaster**

#### **SRC Business and Employment Opportunity Annual Report 2022**

The SRC Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee is responsible for reviewing, analyzing, and providing guidance to the MRC on methods and best practices for employment and employment services.

**A continued interest of the BEO in the past year has been to Increase awareness and access to state job opportunities for people in the Commonwealth with disabilities.**

BEO Committee received regular feedback from MRC on it's involvement with the Disability Employment Action Committee (DEAC), an interagency group working to increase employment of people with disabilities to reach equity goals that have been established.

In April MRC created a 1-page document: "How to create a MassCareers profile" that it provided to the committee to be circulated amongst interested people and supporters in the Commonwealth.

The committee learned in June that the DEAC planned and hosted a speed recruiting event with 20 hiring managers within Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and other state agencies, including the Dept of Revenue, Mass Office on Disability, Dept Housing Community Development, Mass Dept of Transportation. The DEAC members regarded the event as a modest success, given that within a week agencies were actively requesting resumes, and at least one MRC consumer had been offered a position to work at the DTA in Fitchburg. The committee hopes to work with MRC to offer specific recommendations designed to promote awareness of the MassCareers opportunities, such as notification of the CILs, Rehabilitation Vendors, and sharing information with organizations like Work Without Limits and the Association for People in Supported Employment.

**BEO worked to develop a robust communications, marketing and branding strategy for the SRC:**

A working group formulated a timeline for the BEO committee to develop and finalize an updated set of SRC Recruitment materials, including feedback by SRC, SRC Executive Committee, and opportunities for full BEO committee to give input, and projected completion in October 2022. A content draft of material for recruitment was produced, and was reviewed and updated at the BEO meeting held in June, in August, all SRC members were invited to the SRC Executive Committee meeting for discussion of the

draft materials, and in August, the final drafts were sent to MRC's Communications Team so that print and social media materials could be developed.

**Finally, BEO began work to better understand what an update of self-employment resource materials would benefit from and require from MRC.**

Committee members have convened a working group in order to better understand the needs for both MRC counselors to support these endeavors and the needs of MRC self-employment seekers.

The workgroup of this committee created a list of survey questions to be put out by the policy committee, and gathered data across MRC Areas, which appear to show the greatest efforts/successes toward successful closures involving Self-employment in the Greenfield and Worcester Areas. The committee plans to receive an update from this workgroup this fall, and proposes to work with MRC toward the following three tasks:

- Adapt the VR S-E Guide from University of Montana Rural Institute on Inclusive Communities, RTC:Rural, for use with MRC consumers and VR counselors
- Develop a S-E resource club
- Establish regional partnerships with universities that house a Small business development center.

## **Consumer Satisfaction**

### **& Needs Assessment**

#### **Committee**

**Co-Chairs: Ronaldo Fujii, MD PhD and Olympia Stroud**

#### **Customer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Committee**

The Statewide Customer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Committee (SCSNAC) ensures consumer perspectives are included in the process of evaluating MRC vocational rehabilitation services. During the fiscal year, the SCSNAC participated and provided input to other SRC committees and ensured that insights pertaining to consumers were communicated to the right people. The SCSNAC actively participated in the MRC *Explore Possibilities Summit* for consumers and provided feedback to MRC and SRC in how to improve future events and increase SRC visibility to consumers.

**MRC Consumer Experience Survey Tool:** The SCSNAC actively participated in the selection of vendors and the review and improvement of the survey tool MRC developed. The Committee collaborated with the agency to provide insight on the research activities and improvement of process and analyses. Our aim was to ensure the survey results could be used to shape future SRC recommendations to MRC for improving vocational rehabilitation services.

**Recruitment:** Creating a diverse environment starts by hearing the voices of all types of backgrounds and building well-rounded representation. The Committee actively recruited new members to the SRC, focusing on the inclusion of un/underrepresented communities, such as the transgender community (who is known to have higher incidences of disability), people of different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and identities. All are welcomed and encouraged to become active participants in the SRC.

**Hearing the voices of Consumers:** MRC consumers had the opportunity to share their experiences during the SCSNAC meetings. We are committed to systematically including time for testimonials and life experiences that can help other consumers reach their VR goals with MRC as they navigate their life struggles. We encourage consumers to bring their experiences to the meetings so the SCSNAC may build actionable recommendations for MRC.

## **Policy Committee**

**Chairperson: Naomi Goldberg**

The SRC 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.

At the beginning of FY22, the committee continued to focus on the State Plan recommendation to increase the SRC's understanding and knowledge of MRC procurement and contracting processes. This recommendation had been carried over from the previous year. The original premise of the recommendation was that procurement and contracting processes created barriers to and delays in consumers' services and outcomes. The original intent was to have the committee identify the barriers and suggest solutions that would ultimately improve vocational rehabilitation services and outcomes. Upon taking ownership of the recommendation, however, the committee determined that without sufficient knowledge of the subject matter, it was not prepared to offer meaningful feedback on how to address any existing barriers. Consequently, the recommendation was rewritten to reflect the need to learn about these processes.

For the first half of the fiscal year, the committee met with various fiscal and program staff, including Business Improvement Partners to learn about these complex processes and the existing barriers to resolving them. During the learning process, the committee chose to focus on four procurement related items that it determined warranted attention based on the initial recommendation that was made. It did so with the knowledge that it could not recommend any solutions without a better understanding of how procurement and contracting works. The areas of focus were:

1. Addressing the need for CIES (Competitive Integrated Employment Services) vendors to properly represent cultural and linguistic needs of consumers.

2. Seeking a mechanism for purchasing services/items when a contract is not in place.
3. Increasing the number of tutors. Participants had discussed increasing search for tutors beyond where they are typically found.
4. Getting feedback from Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors about barriers they are receiving relative to procurement.

Although the committee could not ultimately recommend solutions for every issue, the learning process helped the committee gain a better understanding of how these processes work. This has served to strengthen SRC members' overall knowledge of the VR program, which can only enhance its ability to provide meaningful feedback to MRC going forward.

Through its research, the committee learned that state procurement processes that MRC must follow are complicated and somewhat inflexible, making it challenging to address the four concerns raised. The committee drew the following conclusions with respect to these concerns. First, it was unable to identify or recommend a mechanism that would quickly address a situation in which a consumer needed to purchase a costly service or item when there is no contract in place. Second, while MRC did not object to the committee's initial suggestion that they survey counselors for feedback on procurement related barriers that they experience, the committee chose not to pursue this request. This decision was based on an awareness that MRC has taken steps to address gaps in service via Business Improvement Partners and is undoubtedly aware of all of the existing barriers in procuring goods and services. Finally, the committee determined that any shortage of tutors that existed when the recommendation was initially made several years prior no longer existed.

In consideration of the SRC's focus on DEI, the committee was particularly interested in continuing to address the recommendation relative to increasing capacity of CIES vendors to serve consumers' cultural and linguistic needs. After learning about the various challenges in hiring and retaining employees with these capacities, as well as the limited number of vendors available in various communities in the state, the committee focused on the subject of increasing the capacity of vendors to provide language access (internally or through a third-party vendor). In doing so, the committee kept in mind that there must be an existing funding mechanism in place if requiring CIES vendors to contract for language access and that putting that mechanism in place would be complicated. From there, the committee learned about the limitations and potential possibilities of incentivizing the ability to speak other languages via cost reimbursement within a contract, a supplemental rate (hourly), or an extra component rate. Another potential to be explored would be strengthening the language in RFR around language capacity and highlighting the expectation to follow through if a vendor indicates that they can speak other languages upon application. Some of these would be much more complicated than others and MRC committed to looking into potential mechanisms for addressing this issue and considering what would work. The committee eventually chose to close its work on the procurement recommendation with a commitment to continue to intermittently track the status of the language access issue.

For the remainder of the fiscal year, the Policy Committee began working on its two newly assigned state plan recommendations. The first, is to develop SRC orientation materials focused on

understanding the role of the SRC and the basics of vocational rehabilitation. The second is to create informational materials for VR consumers that explain the basics of the VR process in clear and understandable language. To date, the committee has begun the process of curating and developing appropriate orientation materials. It has also begun to identify important VR topics for which consumers could benefit from further explanation. Once topics are selected, the committee will draft basic fact sheets in easy-to-understand language that could be distributed to consumers. The committee will continue its focus on these recommendations during FY23.

## **State Plan & Interagency Relations**

### **Committee**

**Chairperson: Joe Bellil**

*The State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee ensures the SRC meets its obligations regarding input from consumers in the development of both the MRC public VR (vocational rehabilitation) State Plan and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan.*

During the FY22 State Plan Committee meetings, committee members reviewed and responded to MRC's responses to the FY22 SRC Recommendations. The committees, in partnership with MRC, worked on their assigned recommendations throughout the year. The committee members appreciated the support given by MRC's staff liaisons. Each MRC liaison brought a wealth of information to the committees, which helped the members progress through their work.

On October 13, 2021, State Plan Committee reviewed the SRC FY22 Recommendations with MRC's responses and provided feedback. The committee members welcomed a presentation by Cheryl Scott, the Executive Director for the MassHire State Workforce Board, on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

In October, the SRC Committee chairpersons wrote up their committee reports for the SRC FY21 Annual Report. MRC's Director of Communication did a wonderful job of compiling all the reports and other data to create the 2021 SRC Annual Report.

On January 26, 2022, the SRC held a special meeting to provide input into MRC's draft of the state plan's VR section. The VR section of the state plan included getting the latest recommendations and MRC's response from the SRC. In addition to collecting data on the progress of the goals and any other input that the SRC had, SRC members were encouraged to attend one of the two Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan Modification Virtual Public Sessions. The WIOA requires the submission of a State Plan that includes a four-year strategy and operational plan for the continuing implementation of the state's workforce development system, with an update after two years.

The committee discussed the focus of the SRC FY23 Recommendations. The members strongly encouraged each SRC committee to ensure their recommendations have a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) lens on it. Each committee reviewed the recommendations that they were working on

currently and discussed what FY23 recommendations should be in light of FY22 accomplishments and expected FY23 consumer-related needs.