

Massachusetts State Rehabilitation Council

An Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Fiscal year 2020 recommendations top seven recommendations in order of priority:

1. Increase and improve the quality of employment outcomes for MRC consumers by:

- a) Developing a self-employment curriculum for those consumers whose interests and/or disabilities are better suited for working independently. For example, MCB has a Small Business Enterprise Program that may serve as a model. The SRC is also requesting data on self-employment outcomes, i.e., what percentage of consumers with IPEs with self-employment goals exited with self-employment and maintained that self-employment in the second quarter after exit.
- b) Ensuring CIES vendors are complying with their MRC contracts and the MRC/EOHHS RFR (e.g., vendors are conducting outreach and developing relationships with prospective employers). To understand MRC's CIES quality control process and data.
- c) Restoring MRC's Individual Consumer Consultant program (ICC) and providing the SRC with the percentage of participants employed upon completing the program during ICC's last two years of existence
- d) The SRC Business & Employment Opportunity Committee working with Bill Allen and his team to understand the team's goals, processes, and barriers to accomplishing those goals, and, where possible, assist with addressing those barriers.

(This recommendation is assigned to the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee)

MRC Response:

1. MRC is committed to continuing to improve the quality of employment outcomes for its consumers. MRC places consumers into a wide variety of jobs based on each individual's interests, needs, skills, and choices. MRC has an existing process that counselors can utilize to develop a self-employment business plan in collaboration with the consumer. MRC can provide data on the number of individuals who have self-employment as an employment goal and outcome data for consumers successfully exiting with self-employment. Self-employment information at 2nd quarter after exit is not available as it is not included in the UI wage data provided to MRC.

MRC has a quality assurance monitoring process for CIES contracts to ensure that CIES vendors comply with the RFR and MRC requirements and to evaluate the quality of services provided under the RFR. Providers report key performance indicator results to MRC on a monthly basis including both performance data and individual progress reports on consumers. Providers also meet with MRC staff to discuss performance on a quarterly basis. MRC will have three program monitoring staff in place to provide oversight on CIES, specifically dedicated to managing vendor relationships. Additionally, the Research, Development, and Performance Management department will provide regular performance reports and conduct a performance evaluation.

MRC recommends that consumers be placed into permanent competitive integrated employment. The ICC program does not currently exist and past outcome data is not

available. MRC is developing a new consumer engagement office/program to outreach to consumers. This program is currently under development.

MRC will continue to closely work with the SRC Business and Employment Opportunity Committee to discuss goals, processes, and work on solutions to overcome barriers to employment for people with disabilities. MRC's Job Placement Director will continue to meet with the SRC committee as part of this process.

2. Continue to increase consumer awareness of transportation options and explore efforts to assist consumers with transportation.

- a) Needs Assessment Committee determined that transportation remains a significant need for many MRC consumers.
- b) MRC should refine and update its transportation fact sheets on MRC's website as needed and incorporate these into trainings and informational materials based upon its research
- c) Development of other informational materials and training should be considered to assist consumers in learning about other available resources including:
 - a. Local Councils on Aging
 - b. EOHHS Human Service Transportation (HST) Office
 - c. MBTA pilot project with Uber and Lyft
 - i. MRC should request for more information
- d) MRC should continue to research collaboration with MassRides, MassMobility, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Career Centers, the HST office, local and regional planning boards, and other organizations on projects or programs that might be able to assist consumers with transportation, given that transportation is a systemic issue requiring collaboration on multiple levels.
 - a. open a discussion on ideas to address the transportation issues facing MRC consumers and individuals with disabilities and how MRC can work together
- e) MRC should also do a survey of its offices to find out more about how its local staff are connected to the local transportation regional coordinating councils.
- f) A plan should be formed to initiate a group of volunteers across the state to drive people to work and back.
- g) This task has many roadblocks but it may be feasible with a co-coordinated effort on the part of many agencies. Regional data should be compiled to possibly have alternative choices based on the demographics of the people and area.
- h) Improve transportation access to consumers by one or more of the following options:
 - a. Establishing an petty cash/revolving fund at each area office for immediate transportation needs (e.g., cash for gas or a cab is cheaper than paying a vendor; North Carolina and South Carolina VR use such funds);
 - b. Putting a local registered taxi company on the state contract (Indiana VR does this);
 - c. Partnering with Uber/Lyft/other ride-share companies (Georgia VR does this);
 - d. Partnering with the entities that fill gas for state vehicles (that entity should already be on the state contract) to allow consumers to get gas from those entities (New Hampshire welfare does something similar);
 - e. Obtaining a credit card from a local gas station (or a state credit card) for each area office tied to a state account that can be used by staff to get gas to a consumer.

(This recommendation is assigned to the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Committee/Consumer Satisfaction Committee)

MRC Response:

2. MRC recognizes that transportation continues to be a significant need for some of our consumer population and can present a barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities. This need has been established through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. This is a complex issue that goes beyond MRC and VR in general and requires collaboration on the local, state, and federal levels.

MRC will update its transportation fact sheets, and MRC can research additional information that we can make available on our website for consumers, including information on councils of aging, the MBTA Ride Uber/Lyft pilot, and others. MRC will also reach out to the Independent Living Centers to discuss collaboration on transportation. MRC has also worked to obtain automatic eligibility for the Transportation Access Pass discount program for MRC consumers.

MRC would like to work with the SRC to open a discussion on collaboration with entities such as MassRides, MassMobility, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Career Centers, and other organizations on potential projects or programs to assist consumers with transportation. The SRC's assistance in this process would be appreciated.

MRC's Transportation Options Grant evaluated the strategy of volunteer rides and discovered a significant obstacle as volunteers would need commercial insurance to transport people in their vehicles and participate in ongoing training programs which would be cost prohibitive

MRC can provide funds to consumers for short-term transportation needs through an existing maintenance resources working with their counselor. EOHHS Human Service Transportation which MRC utilizes has an array of vendors for transportation including taxi companies. MRC can reach out to Georgia VR to find out about their partnership with ride share companies and check with the MBTA on their Uber/Lyft pilot. MRC will continue to utilize its maintenance process which allows for monitoring of costs and internal controls.

- 3. Increase the quantity and quality (i.e., wage outcomes) of on-the-job trainings (OJTs), on-the-job evaluations (OJEs), job driven trainings (JDTs), and apprenticeships by targeting employers who offer higher wages and targeting in-demand skill sets (e.g., Salesforce).**

In addition to the annual Office of Federal Contract Compliance program (OFCCP) hiring event, MRC should also consider developing regionalized hiring events in collaboration with the regional employment advisory boards.

(This recommendation is assigned to the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee)

MRC Response:

The MRC Job Placement Team has developed a wide variety of employer partnerships. MRC has and will continue to utilize OJTs, OJEs, and Job Driven Trainings such as Home Depot, Human Service Worker, CVS, and other employers, and is developing a new JDT with Cisco. For the annual OFCCP hiring event, this is a statewide event, which includes local components across the state, and

MRC will continue to work with employer advisory boards on job placement efforts. MRC will develop key performance indicators and will measure outcomes including wages for these efforts.

4. **Given the increasing number of individuals diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum, MRC should identify and utilize resources that will expand staff and CIES vendor knowledge and understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorders and practical strategies for supporting vocational rehabilitation (VR) consumers as they learn to live and work independently.** Examples of resources include: the Asperger/Autism Network (AANE), Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN), the Autism Commission, and Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC).

(This recommendation is assigned to the Underserved/Underserved Population Committee/Executive Committee)

MRC response:

MRC is committed to supporting vocational rehabilitation consumers with Autism Spectrum Disorders in their efforts to live and work independently. The MRC Commissioner is a co-chair of the Autism Commission, and MRC works closely with the Department of Developmental Services, which is the designated agency to provide services for individuals on the Autism Spectrum. MRC will continue to collaborate with AANE, FCSN, and other entities to improve services for individuals on the Autism Spectrum. MRC's training department in collaboration with AANE will continue to develop and provide staff trainings related to assisting consumers on the Autism Spectrum.

5. **Procure other important services on the state contract (e.g., math tutors at each area office, standardized test registration) to avoid having consumers pay upfront for these services (or not receive them at all), especially when many consumers (e.g., clients on SSI and/or SSDI) are not obligated to contribute to the cost of their VR services.** The SRC Policy Committee is requesting a list of MRC services that are currently on the state contract to understand what MRC can already write purchase orders (POs) for and thereby also know what services MRC cannot pay via PO.

Meanwhile, the SRC Policy Committee would coordinate with the SRC Consumer Needs/Satisfaction Committee to determine whether survey responses can also identify services needed on the state contract and will share its findings with MRC. The SRC recommends MRC conduct a survey of area offices asking counselors what services they believe are needed on the state contract and share survey results with the SRC Policy Committee.

Lastly, the SRC requests the following to better inform members on the procurement process: a) the job title and department of MRC staff who handle procuring services on the state contract, b) how MRC makes decisions on what services to procure including how often a review of needed services occurs, c) a brief description of the key steps and barriers to procuring services on the state contract including the approximate duration of the procurement process, and d) what the current remedy is for services needed by a consumer that are not on the state contract.

MRC response:

MRC will make available a list of services utilizing contracts to the SRC. MRC can provide information from the Needs Assessment in terms of services identified by consumers as important and needed. MRC can utilize its counselor satisfaction survey to ask counselors about what services could be procured on a statewide basis. MRC is in the process of enhancing our Contracts

Department including staffing, and will provide an update to the SRC on progress. MRC conducts an annual review of contracts that involves program and fiscal staff, and MRC follows applicable state procurement rules and processes to procure services. MRC can have a fiscal staff person attend a SRC meeting to review the procurement process.

(This recommendation is assigned to the Statewide Needs Assessment Committee/Consumer Satisfaction Committee (Redirected to the Policy Committee))

6. Continue outreach to communities of ethnic and diverse backgrounds on vocational rehabilitation and other MRC service offerings, especially in the Asian community:

- a) The MRC has made a commitment to reach out to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are also ethnic and cultural minorities through its Diversity Committee and through its Language Access Plan.
- b) The MRC should continue these outreach efforts to ethnic and cultural minorities, especially to the Asian community, which has been identified as slightly underserved by the VR program in Massachusetts.
- c) As growth in the Asian community continues to be seen in the state's general population, it is recommended that MRC continues its outreach efforts to Asian communities in particular.
 - a. There was growth in the number of Asian consumers served by MRC during FY2018 but it still remains below the proportion in the overall state population.
- d) MRC conducted a focus group of Asian consumers in the Lowell office during Fall 2018.
 - a. Information from this focus group and additional consultation with MRC's Diversity Committee yielded a wealth of information and suggestions on additional steps MRC can take in this area to further engage with the Asian community
 - b. It is recommended MRC use the findings from this focus group to assist in developing strategies for outreach to this community.
 - c. Several focus groups will be scheduled in the coming year.
- e) It was suggested that the first focus group be held in the Braintree office. Possible other sites are Boston and Cape Cod
- f) MRC should continue to focus on how to reach out effectively to these communities, including conducting outreach to local community agencies and organizations that serve ethnic and cultural minorities, among other methods.
- g) MRC should continue to consult its Bi-Lingual Committee for recommendations on how to reach out more to minority communities
- h) MRC has been successfully increasing its numbers in terms of Hispanic community and best practices in this area may also assist with outreach to the Asian community.
- i) Possible other outreach areas, are local public cable TV shows, targeting the underserved communities.
- j) Radio programs can also be included. Many in the languages of the particular group, we are trying to serve. Also reaching out to local non-profit organizations in the community.
- k) Having a presence at various functions such as conferences or community gatherings, with perhaps a booth distributing literature.
- l) The SRC Unserved/Underserved Committee should add reaching out to the Asian community to their agenda.
- m) Furthermore, it is recommended that the MRC's Diversity Committee, the SRC Needs Assessment Committee and Unserved/Underserved committee consider meeting jointly to

come up with ideas for enhanced outreach to minority communities, including the Asian community.

(This recommendation is assigned to the Statewide Needs Assessment Committee/Consumer Satisfaction Committee)

MRC response:

MRC is committed to serve communities of ethnic and diverse backgrounds across Massachusetts to assist consumers in obtaining competitive employment. MRC has identified through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment that Asian/Pacific Islanders are slightly underserved by the MRC VR program in comparison to their proportion in the statewide population.

MRC conducted a focus group of Asian consumers and community members in the Lowell office during Fall 2018. MRC is planning an additional focus group in the Braintree/Quincy area. The Lowell Focus Group revealed a number of possible strategies for outreach to the Asian community. A workplan was developed with Local Area Office staff to follow up on the recommendations made in the focus group. These efforts could be replicated in other area offices as a strategy. MRC is in the process of establishing a consumer engagement office/program to outreach to consumers. MRC will work with the new manager of this program and the Diversity/Bilingual Committee, and the SRC Unserved/Underserved Committee to develop a community outreach model and strategy for the Asian community, including a workplan to conduct outreach to local community agencies and organizations that serve ethnic and cultural minorities.

- 7. Increasing post-secondary training outcomes by adding dedicated college liaisons to MRC staff who encourage VR consumers to seek postsecondary training, ensure consumer connections to college disability services, and research grants/scholarships.** In addition, the SRC is recommending MRC counselors refer consumers, as appropriate, to the American Student Assistance program for help finding grants/scholarships and navigating higher education.

MRC response:

MRC counselors serve as liaisons, and work closely with colleges and universities to refer consumers to college disability service offices. MRC staff and vendors work closely with post-secondary institutions on assisting consumers in obtaining post-secondary training. MRC will research information on the American Student Assistance program and can make available to its counseling staff.

(This recommendation is assigned to the Business and Employment Committee (Redirected to the Policy Committee)).

MRC will work closely with the SRC to establish a workplan to track progress on the recommendations and associated steps related to the recommendations. MRC will work with the SRC to use electronic methods, such as Survey Monkey, to collect recommendations from the SRC. MRC will also connect the SRC with SRC's in other states to acquire best practices.