Massachusetts Commission for the Blind VR Research Initiatives 2020

Scope 2: Vocational Rehabilitation Closure Findings Report

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# Executive Summary

Understanding the factors that lead to successful case closures (defined as cases closing with competitive employment in an integrated setting) involves exploring cases that have been closed to determine what factors, characteristics of clients served and the services they received are most likely to lead to successful outcomes.

This report compliments and builds upon work that Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) completed earlier this year for the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) in an interim report titled Scope 2: Vocational Rehabilitation Closures Compiled Analysis Report (Compiled Analysis Report). The Compiled Analysis Report analyzed Rehabilitation Services Administration case management data to outline the characteristics and demographics of successfully closed cases to determine the factors that strongly predict successful case closures.

The Compiled Analysis Report delineated several findings that merited further investigation. However, PCG found it difficult to follow-up on all of these findings due to case management data limitations. As a work-around, we explored other avenues of information such as quantitative and qualitative MCB consumer survey data, and focus group and interview data from individuals, MCB, and provider staff who support MCB consumers to paint a more detailed picture of successful case closures.

Highlights from our findings include:

* Among closed cases, **transportation** was reported as a barrier in the Consumer Survey almost twice as often as the next most common barrier, employer attitudes toward people with disabilities. All providers, including youth service providers, emphasized the inaccessibility of transportation as a limiting factor to achieving employment. Survey respondents expressed transportation barriers in multiple ways, including difficulty commuting to and from MCB offices (although MCB client seldom, if ever, need to visit MCB offices to receive services; staff appointments take place in clients’ homes or workplaces) and as a broader need for transportation services throughout the Commonwealth.
* Both regression and decision tree analyses indicate the most important factor for determining successful employment is having a job at the time of case opening. Cases with **primary support of personal income** are much more likely to close successfully, as are those that have met **educational milestones**, received general assistance or that had private health insurance at the time of application. Individuals with low levels of education, the most significant disabilities, who are long term unemployed or have low incomes are least likely to have successful case closures.
* Focus groups consistently noted the importance of having **access to current technology**, the funding to make upgrades and training for consumers to become technically proficient and self-sufficient.
* **Mobility and Orientation skills** were seen by focus group participants as critical to the success of VR consumers and one of the central skills to focus on during service provision.
* **Individual characteristics** such as “motivation”, “tenacity” and “self-advocacy” are also seen as vital to achieving successful, integrated employment outcomes.
* Consumers with closed cases were, on average, less likely to report a positive **consumer experience** with MCB counselors by 19.3-percentage points across the entire range of MCB counselor questions in our Consumer Survey. Consistency across these questions suggests there a meaningful difference in consumer experience between those with active vs. inactive cases. This may suggest that some consumers whose cases are inactive have left MCB services because they did not have a positive experience.
* Those who work with younger VR participants frequently emphasized **parental involvement** and coordination as important success factors, specifically, helping their child create a plan for employment and achieving goals. Discussions also touched upon helping younger individuals build the **personal and emotional skills** necessary for that development, in particular, independence and self-advocacy skills.

We understand that cases with primary support of personal income are much more likely to close successfully and acknowledge MCB’s priority of increasing consumer participation in the labor force. As such, we crafted our findings into both interim and longer term recommendations focused on increasing employment among MCB consumers of all ages.

We have grouped our recommendations into the following categories:

* Increase access to transportation services.
* Improve mobility and orientation services;
* Prepare for a technology first future;
* Identify and address barriers to completing educational milestones; and
* Evaluate case status and services for MCB Youth.

Our recommendations highlight areas for further research and examination that complement MCB’s already considerable investment in staff, advocacy, resources and knowledge. We outline concrete action steps that MCB can take to immediately leverage their considerable strengths to improve outcomes for both the youth and adult consumers they serve, and continue moving the field forward in improving employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

# Introduction

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) seeks to better understand the factors that lead to a successful case outcome. MCB has partnered with Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to carefully and rigorously examine past cases that have closed to determine what factors, characteristics of clients served and the services they received are most likely lead to successful outcomes.

## Background

This brief on Vocational Rehabilitation case closures entitled Scope 2: Vocational Rehabilitation Closure Findings Report compliments and builds upon work that was completed by PCG earlier this year in an interim report titled Scope 2: Vocational Rehabilitation Closures Compiled Analysis Report (Compiled Analysis Report) dated May 29, 2020. This interim Compiled Analysis Report examined MCB’s Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 reports from the years 2019, 2018, and 2017 and outlined the characteristics and demographics of successfully closed cases. It delineated the factors that are the strongest predictors of successful case closures according to what was present in the data files. The definition of successful case closure used in this document is a case closed with competitive employment in an integrated employment setting.

## Purpose

The Compiled Analysis Report delineated several findings that merited further investigation. Due to data limitations PCG was able to pursue some but not all of these findings as outlined in the table below:

* **Personal income as a primary support:** The presence or absence of personal income as a primary support proved to be a major factor in determining successful case closure in both the decision tree and regression analyses. Case management data limitations prevented PCG from obtaining a deeper understanding of the barriers these unemployed individuals face.
* **Race and ethnicity:** PCG identified differences in case success based on race and ethnicity. Individuals who are members of an ethnic minority frequently face difficulty finding employment without MCB involvement. The VR Needs Assessment Report indicated that minority individuals generally report a less positive experience with MCB counselors and services. PCG was unable to verify these differences in closed cases given small population size and data limitations.
* **Veteran status:** PCG noted large differences in veteran status during exploratory and descriptive analysis. Veterans are rare in the closure population so PCG was not able to follow up and further understand these experiences.
* **Covid-19:** PCG considered the impact of Covid-19 on future case closures as competitive, integrated employment becomes more competitive and isolated. MCB should explore new areas of opportunity and modes of employment to prepare for a post-pandemic employment market.
* **Individuals under age 22:** Individuals under age 22 rarely achieve competitive, integrated employment as a successful outcome. Instead, this population tends to close into statuses considered ‘ineligible’ in this report, including transferring to other service providers or moving into long term, residential care settings. PCG has considered whether competitive, integrated employment should define success for this population given the breadth and scope of MCB services, the changing employment landscape, and the wide needs of individuals served. These individuals are examined more fully in the Pre-ETS Needs Assessment Report.

As a work around to the data limitations, PCG explored other avenues of information to determine in more detail what factors, client characteristics and services received were most likely to lead to a successful case outcome. We incorporated information from various data sources – including existing case management data, MCB consumer survey data, focus group and interview data from individuals who support MCB consumers[[1]](#footnote-2), and other qualitative data – to paint a more detailed picture of successful case closures beyond the findings of the Compiled Analysis Report. See the Methodology section of this report for more information on our data sources.

## Acronyms and Glossary

The following terms are used throughout this document. The full meaning of each of these commonly used acronyms in Table 1 is provided here for reader ease of reference.

Table 1: Common Acronyms

| **Acronym** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| ACA | Affordable Care Act |
| AWARE | Accessible Web-Based Activity and Reporting Environment |
| CAP | Client Assistance Program |
| CMR | Code of Massachusetts Regulations |
| CSNA | Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment |
| ELL | English Language Learner |
| IPE | Individualized Plan for Employment |
| MCB | Massachusetts Commission for the Blind |
| O&M | Orientation and Mobility |
| PCG | Public Consulting Group, Inc. |
| Pre-ETS | Pre-Employment Transition Services  |
| RSA | Rehabilitation Services Administration |
| TVI | Teacher of the Visually Impaired |
| VR | Vocational Rehabilitation |

# Methodology

This section of our report explains in detail how PCG used multiple data sources to develop the analysis and recommendations within this report. We incorporated information from various data sources, including existing case management data, MCB consumer survey data, and focus group and interview data from individuals who support MCB consumers. We also collected and analyzed qualitative data (personal experiences and stories).

## Consumer Survey

The MCB Consumer Survey was developed and implemented by PCG in collaboration with MCB. The survey was designed to collect basic demographic characteristics and better understand individuals’ experiences working with MCB, their program successes and challenges, the barriers they faced when seeking employment, services they used or required and the groups with which they partnered in the community while seeking a job. The survey featured sixty-three questions. Questions varied somewhat depending upon a respondent’s specific answer patterns. Most questions featured multiple choice responses and many also included free form text fields for respondents’ additional thoughts. The survey took, on average, twenty-four minutes to complete.

The survey was designed using Qualtrics survey software and hosted entirely online. Several draft survey iterations were rigorously tested by MCB and PCG staff so that the final version ensured functionality, question logic and the highest possible degree of accessibility for the visually impaired and/or those who would need to use assistive technology to help them complete the survey.

MCB distributed the survey via anonymous link to individuals for whom they had an e-mail address. This included: currently enrolled Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) consumers/participants; individuals with closed VR cases; individuals for whom MCB had an e-mail address but no finding of eligibility was ever made/services received; and youth enrolled in pre-employment transition (Pre-ETS) services. Individuals were also allowed proxy responses; responses by a parent, spouse or caretaker familiar with the targeted individual’s situation and concerns.

MCB invited 2,560 individuals with valid e-mail addresses to participate in the survey. Of these, 882 individuals opened the initial e-mail contact. PCG received 225 surveys in which respondents answered five or more questions. The final survey response rate was 8.8%, including 134 current VR consumers and 91 individuals who did not have an active VR case or were unsure about their case status.

PCG included respondents who did not know their open or closed case status (indicated by selecting “unknown” in the survey) as closed cases in our analysis. It is unlikely that an individual with an open case who is actively participating in VR activities would be unsure of their case status. Respondents who did not know their case status likely included individuals whose case had closed but who may not have been aware of this change.

The survey instrument is included in the Appendix section of this report.

## Key Informant Focus Groups & Interviews

We conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with a variety of audiences in order to learn more about individuals’ experiences with MCB, the services provided by MCB, MCB strengths and potential service gaps. We conducted focus groups with service providers, individuals receiving MCB VR services, youth who received Pre-ETS services, and teachers of students with visual impairments who may have received receive Pre-ETS services. Focus group audiences, the number of focus groups conducted for each audience and the total number of focus groups participants are delineated in the Table 2 below.

Individual MCB consumers proved difficult to reach throughout this research effort. We made multiple outreach attempts and continuously rescheduled groups in an attempt to accommodate consumer schedules. Despite our efforts our consumer participation success was limited, particularly with consumers whose cases had closed. These consumers are, by definition, those with the lowest levels of MCB contact and frequently lack up-to-date contact information. We included this closed case population in our consumer survey outreach effort as a work-around. This effort garnered notably more success. (See the Consumer Surveys section of this report for more detail.)

PCG and MCB collaborated to find additional work-arounds to augment consumer participation, including reaching out to service providers and teachers of visually impaired youth. The groups we interviewed – such as the Lowell Association for the Blind and the Carrol Center for the Blind – included some of the largest service providers in the Commonwealth serving MCB consumers. We scheduled interviews and focus groups with these organizations around existing MCB outreach efforts in order to maximize participation.

Table : Summary of Focus Groups Conducted

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Audience** | **Number of Groups** | **Total Number of Participants** |
| Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers | 2 | 6 |
| MCB Staff | 1 | 7 |
| Service Providers | 2 | 10 |
| Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments | 1 | 5 |

We digitally conducted all focus groups using the Zoom videoconferencing software platform. We chose Zoom because of the relatively high degree of familiarity and accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. In addition to taking notes, we recorded these sessions in order to ensure accuracy of reporting.

In addition, PCG conducted several one-on-one interviews with providers, teachers, and individuals who were unable to attend one of our focus groups.

## Case Management Data

PCG analyzed case management data from MCB’s Rehabilitation Services Administration’s (RSA) 911 reports from 2017 through 2019. We identified the demographic characteristics of consumers who had received MCB services and analyzed the services that were provided to them for consumers whose case had closed between 2017 and 2019. We focused on the most recent case or support provided by MCB for individuals with multiple case openings. We included our findings in the Compiled Analysis Report. This data was also used to perform the predictive analysis re-printed in this report.

While MCB provided RSA 911 data going back to 2014, these data were formatted in a significantly different manner, preventing us from identifying specific individuals and thus understanding the characteristics and services they received. Absent from records were unique, individual ID numbers that could be tracked from year to year. In addition, data fields were not labeled in ways that aligned with the data dictionary definitions found in RSA documents.

## Qualitative Analysis

PCG incorporated qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, and consumer surveys into this report to inform both broad themes and details. Qualitative data is critical to understanding the needs and views of any group. Often, it is used as a first step in a new research processes in order to identify previously unknown issues so researchers can learn more about concerns they had not been aware of. Perhaps most importantly, qualitative research provides a chance for individuals to express their issues and concerns as they understand and experience them. Individuals can express themselves in their own words, increasing the chances they will feel heard. This is critical to ensuring that identified needs are embraced by stakeholders at every level. Finally, qualitative data is less likely to be affected by any researchers or funding organization’s unintentional filters or biases.

All qualitative research was analyzed by trained PCG staff using what is known as a grounded analytical method. Grounded analysis in qualitative research is a process whereby analysts attempt to review gathered data without preconceived ideas of what may be present. Rather than building upon themes identified in the quantitative research, then searching for links or supporting materials, the qualitative research is allowed to speak for itself. Analysts identify themes that emerge naturally from the data and then tie qualitative and quantitative research themes together.

PCG analysts read and reviewed all qualitative data and created summary documents in order to include important, high-level findings in this report. Analysts reviewed notes and recordings of focus groups and interviews, and nearly 1,000 open-ended comments generated by the consumer survey. Synthesized material informed our findings and recommendations herein.

# Results

## Overview

The results of our research identified several meaningful trends, including differences between individuals who have had their cases closed and those with current, active VR cases, challenges that highlight the issues most likely to be mentioned within qualitative research, and predictive analysis identifying the most influential factors determining case closure success.

Areas of focus include:

* Experience with MCB service;
* Experience with MCB counselors;
* Barriers to employment;
* Service usage;
* Relationship with community partners; and
* Challenges receiving services.

## Patterns and Trends

### Consumer Survey Results

The MCB Consumer Survey divided cases into two categories; closed, inactive cases and open, active cases (current participants). MCB was unable to provide PCG with consumer contact information tied to case status, so MCB and PCG agreed to use the Consumer Survey to ask individuals whether or not they had an open case with MCB. This strategy limited our ability to analyze case status as individuals were not expected to know or record whether their case was close successfully, closed unsuccessfully, or determined ineligible. As such, PCG was unable to determine a specific status/reason for each case closure in the Consumer Survey.

The MCB Consumer Survey revealed several meaningful trends among individuals whose cases had been closed. (The survey instrument is included in the Appendix section of this report.) The survey showed across a variety of questions that individuals whose cases are closed are less likely to report positive interactions with MCB than individuals whose cases are currently open. Often, this is due to an increase in Don’t Know or Unsure responses. This is at best a sign that individuals are leaving MCB services with a recollection of negative experiences.

For ease and clarity, we have combined response categories in the questions below. The original answer categories were presented along a Likert scale from strongly agree, agree, disagree, to strongly disagree. We have collapsed these into two categories – agree (including agree and strongly agree) and disagree (including disagree and strongly disagree). These questions have been marked with [A/D].

Table 3 shows the percentage of individuals with closed cases who agreed or strongly agreed with a list of statements about the services they received from MCB. The second column displays the percentage of current respondents (open cases) who answered the same question. The third column displays the percentage point difference between the two. Individuals with closed cases were less likely to agree to every statement. The largest differences between open and closed cases pertained to the convenience of the location of services (18.6 point difference) and participation in the development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) (23.5 point difference). It is also notable that fewer than half of surveyed respondents with closed cases agreed with the majority of propositions.

Table : Service Satisfaction by Case Status

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Service Satisfaction** | **% Agree Closed Cases** | **% Agree Current Participant** | **Difference** |
| I receive services in a place that is convenient for me. [A/D] | 70.1% | 88.7% | -18.6% |
| MCB provided me with the technology or equipment I needed to receive services. [A/D] | 67.0% | 79.4% | -12.3% |
| MCB provided the accommodations I needed to receive services. [A/D] | 64.8% | 79.4% | -14.6% |
| The MCB office is open at times that work for me. [A/D] | 48.9% | 62.8% | -13.9% |
| I received the testing or assessments I needed. [A/D] | 44.8% | 57.9% | -13.1% |
| I can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services. [A/D] | 40.9% | 48.1% | -7.2% |
| I helped develop my plan or IPE. [A/D] | 31.5% | 55.0% | -23.5% |
| I can get around easily in MCB offices. [A/D] | 29.9% | 38.6% | -8.8% |

*N>=217*

A similar pattern emerges when we analyze respondents’ answers about their experience with MCB counselors in Table 4. While individuals whose cases have been closed mostly agree that their counselors respect aspects of their identity and respond in a timely way, they were less likely to agree to every statement about MCB counselors than those whose cases are currently open. The largest differences between open and closed cases pertained to whether counselors informed consumers about their rights (22.8 point difference) and whether counselors considered consumers’ interests, strengths, abilities and needs when developing rehabilitation plans (24.6 point difference).

Table : Counselor Experience by Case Status

| **Counselor Experience** | **% Agree Closed Cases** | **% Agree Current Participant** | **Difference** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| My counselor respects my culture, background, and identity. [A/D] | 69.2% | 87.4% | -18.2% |
| My counselor responded in a timely way to my questions, concerns, or needs. [A/D] | 64.9% | 80.2% | -15.2% |
| My counselor explained why I was eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. [A/D] | 53.8% | 68.5% | -14.7% |
| My counselor considered my interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing my rehabilitation plan. [A/D] | 45.5% | 70.1% | -24.6% |
| My counselor informed me of my rights during the VR process. [A/D] | 44.2% | 66.9% | -22.8% |
| My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment. [A/D] | 38.5% | 57.9% | -19.5% |
| My counselor helped me understand the sorts of careers I can pursue. [A/D] | 28.2% | 48.0% | -19.8% |

*N>=204*

The Consumer Survey included a series of questions designed to identify the barriers that individuals were most likely to face when trying to find or keep a job. The following table includes respondents who answered that they had experienced at least one of the barriers to employment mentioned. Overall, respondents whose cases were closed reported facing similar barriers to respondents whose cases are open, though often at different rates.

Regardless of case status, respondents who reported barriers were by far most likely to report transportation as the greatest barrier to employment. Among closed cases, transportation was reported as a barrier almost twice as often as the next most common barrier. Transportation issues were also a common theme reoccurring in focus groups with teachers of the blind, VR staff, and current program participants.

The next most common barrier is employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. This echoed feedback received in focus groups and interviews. There appears to be a widely held perception that employers are unable or unwilling to accommodate individuals with visual impairments. This consistency across open and closed cases is also seen in some of the other most commonly reported barriers; resources for people with disabilities, potential loss of benefits (“benefits cliff”), poor job markets and a lack of opportunities to explore careers.

For brevity, we have included in the following Table 5 only those barriers reported by 10% or more of respondents. 69.6% of all cases reported at least one barrier, including 61.5% of closed cases.

Table : Barriers Experienced by Case Status

| **Barrier** | **% Yes** **Closed Cases** | **% Yes** **Current Participants** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Transportation | 69.1% | 61.0% |
| Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities | 38.2% | 49.0% |
| Resources for people with disabilities | 32.7% | 35.0% |
| Potential loss of benefits | 32.7% | 25.0% |
| Poor job market or a lack of opportunities | 29.1% | 36.0% |
| Lack of opportunities to explore careers | 25.5% | 24.0% |
| Some other basic need(s)  | 21.8% | 21.0% |
| More money | 20.0% | 27.0% |
| Housing | 16.4% | 26.0% |
| Some other job-related challenge(s)  | 16.4% | 20.0% |
| Some other legal need(s)  | 16.4% | 19.0% |
| Educational or training funding | 12.7% | 26.0% |
| Additional benefits (medical coverage, dental coverage) | 10.9% | 22.0% |
| Benefits counseling | 10.9% | 14.0% |
| Food | 10.9% | 11.0% |
| Some other financial need(s)  | 10.9% | 9.0% |

*N=155*

As shown in Table 6, respondents whose cases were closed were slightly less likely than respondents whose cases were open to report the use of a community partner with two exceptions; the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired Community Services and the Department of Elder Services. However, all differences fell within the expected rate of error.

Respondents using a community partner were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 4 (with a 1 representing ‘not well at all’ at 1 to a 4 representing ‘very well’) how well MCB coordinated services with that partner. The average score was 3.3 among all cases and a 3.0 among closed cases. Taken together with the lower community partners usage rate, this suggests that those with closed cases are less likely to be connected, or be connected meaningfully, with outside service providers and resources while working with MCB.

Table : Community Partner Use by Case Status

|  | **% Yes - Closed Cases** | **% Yes - Current Participant** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Carroll Center for the Blind | 43.2% | 47.2% |
| MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) | 29.7% | 36.1% |
| Perkins School for the Blind | 29.7% | 33.3% |
| Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities) | 13.5% | 16.7% |
| MAB Community Services | 13.5% | 9.7% |
| Department of Elder Services | 13.5% | 1.4% |
| Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission | 10.8% | 12.5% |
| Department of Education (K-12) | 8.1% | 5.6% |
| Someone else | 8.1% | 13.9% |
| Massachusetts Office on Disability | 2.7% | 1.4% |
| Lowell Association for the Blind | 2.7% | 0.0% |
| One-Stop Career Center | 0.0% | 5.6% |
| Department of Developmental Services | 0.0% | 4.2% |
| Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | 0.0% | 2.8% |
| Department of Public Health | 0.0% | 1.4% |

*N=109*

The survey also asked about support services provided by MCB and outside community partner service providers. Table 7 displays the rate at which respondents (both open and closed cases) reported receiving certain supportive services, either directly from MCB or by a community partner. The largest discrepancy in supportive services provided (by both MCB and community partner providers) was independent living skills training and help with transportation. Respondents whose cases were open were more likely to report receiving both of these services than respondents whose cases had been closed. Transportation was the most commonly reported support service received, though it was reported as received by a notably lower portion of all cases than those that encountered it as a barrier to employment.

Table : Services Received by Case Status

| **Support Service Received** | **Closed Cases** | **Current Participants** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Service Provided by MCB** | **Service Provided by Partner** | **Service Provided by MCB** | **Service Provided by Partner** |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 3.3% | 0.0% | 9.7% | 3.0% |
| Group and peer support | 4.4% | 1.1% | 6.7% | 6.7% |
| Help with housing | 3.3% | 0.0% | 3.7% | 5.2% |
| Independent living skills training | 9.9% | 6.6% | 23.9% | 14.2% |
| Social security benefits counseling | 1.1% | 0.0% | 11.2% | 9.7% |
| Moving from a group home facility to independent living | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.5% | 0.7% |
| Help with transportation | 11.0% | 9.9% | 15.7% | 20.9% |
| Unsure | 7.7% | 3.3% | 6.0% | 3.0% |

*N=107*

### Key Informant Focus Groups and Interviews Results

PCG conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with a variety of audiences – including service providers, individuals receiving MCB VR services, youth who received Pre-ETS services, and teachers of students with visual impairments who may have received Pre-ETS services – in order to learn more about individuals’ experiences with MCB, the services provided by MCB, MCB strengths and potential service gaps. Despite multiple outreach attempts we had limited success reaching individual MCB consumers, particularly those whose cases had closed. We also interviewed some of the largest service providers in the Commonwealth. The themes that permeated these discussions are summarized herein.

All focus groups noted, at least to some extent, the importance of technology. Discussion centered around technology skills and the types of technology that individuals need to be successful, such as screen readers and talk-to-type software. Open response comments in the Consumer Survey emphasized the importance of having access to *current* technology, the funding to make upgrades and the training to become proficient. Participants cited the importance of training individuals to operate and troubleshoot the adaptive technology they use to perform their jobs. This important self-sufficiency skill could make many more technology-oriented jobs – for example, most office jobs – more available to the blind and visually impaired.

All focus groups frequently mentioned the importance of orientation and mobility (O&M) skills. Discussion focused on O&M skills from the micro level – navigating a single workplace – to a more macro level such as navigating downtown Boston or using public transportation. O&M skills were seen by focus group participants as critical to the success of VR consumers and one of the central skills to focus on during service provision.

There was also some discussion of individual characteristics important to achieving successful, competitive integrated employment outcomes. These were often described with terms such as ‘motivated’, ‘tenacity’, and ‘self-advocacy’.

“I think it’s interesting that most of what we are saying really has nothing to do with visual impairment, this is true about anybody.”

Those who work with younger VR participants frequently emphasized two important factors in helping them succeed. The first was parental involvement and coordination. TVIs and Pre-ETS providers both focused on the importance of parental involvement in helping their children create a plan for employment and achieving their goals. The discussion also focused on helping younger individuals build the personal and emotional skills necessary for that development, in particular, independence and self-advocacy skills.

Another important factor emphasized by all providers, but in particular by youth service providers, was the inaccessibility of transportation. This was particularly true of providers serving rural areas but was also raised during discussions of consumers based in and around metro Boston. Providers seemed well-informed about transportation options, including MBTA’s blind access card. However, they noted that transportation services were not well-suited to many consumers who lacked the skills to use them properly, without guidance. Providers serving consumers in more rural areas cited a near absence of transportation options. There are few public transportation routes, limited sidewalks and expensive private market options like Uber, Lyft or taxis. This is a limiting factor to achieving employment.

## Case Management Data Results

PCG conducted several types of predictive analytics to determine the factors most likely to impact the outcome of closed cases. This information is largely reproduced from the Compiled Closures Data Report with text updates to clarify meaning and findings.

Predictive analytics uses data to determine the characteristics that are common between outcomes, in this case, the presence of successful employment as an outcome. Definitions of successful closures, unsuccessful closures, and ineligible cases are included in the Appendix section of this report.

### Decision Tree

Decision trees seek to interpret data based on outcomes i.e. they split data into groups by their features so that the next group has the largest difference possible in the measured outcome. By doing this repeatedly, we can identify the combination of factors that show a determinative effect on the measured outcome.

As seen in Figure 1, decision trees are composed of two parts; nodes and branches. Each node represents the fulfillment of a variable condition. Each branch represents a new variable, and thus links prior nodes to new nodes.

Figure : Example of Decision Tree Flow

All Cases

Node 1

Branch A

Cases

Cases

Branch B

In a decision tree, each node contains several pieces of information. For example, our MCB decision tree (included in the Appendix of this report) examines the outcome of a successful closure. At the top is the most common outcome of the variable being examined. In our decision tree, this always results in a 0 (an unsuccessful closure is the most common outcome) or a 1 (a successful closure is the most common outcome). The next two numbers represent the split of individuals with a 0 (an unsuccessful outcome) or a 1 (a successful outcome) as a percent of cases entering that node. The final number represents the rate at which all cases enter that node.

Beneath each node is a branch. Each branch represents a variable response, as named. Cases for which that response is true go to the node on the left, while cases for which that response is not true go to the node on the right.

This continues until the combination of variables with the largest difference in outcomes is determined.

Our MCB decision tree examines all MCB case closures from 2017 to 2019 in the RSA 911 that resulted in either a successful or unsuccessful closure. We removed ineligible cases from our analysis as they are frequently determined by factors outside of MCB control and typically feature a large amount of incomplete or unknown data, factors that can confound analysis. In addition, we removed 10 records with large amounts of missing data. In total, we used 589 records to create this model.

The results of this decision tree highlight several factors that MCB should consider regarding its services and planning. The most important of these is present at the first branch: cases where individuals have primary support of personal income are much more likely to close successfully. The single best predictor of a successful MCB case closure (individual is employed) is whether that individual was already employed when they applied for services. While more than three quarters (79%) of these cases close successfully, less than half (43%) of individuals who do not have a job at the time of employment cases close successfully.

Age appears as the determining factor across several branches. This suggests a very complex relationship with outcomes. As noted in the Compiled Analysis Report, the youngest individuals served by MCB have the least successful outcomes. As such, MCB may want to consider ways to expand outreach and services to this population, along with a more meaningful definition of success for these cases.

A graphic representation of our decision tree and results can be found in the Appendix section of this report.

### Stepwise Regression

Regression analysis is a type of statistical analysis that attempts to determine the mathematical relationship between a specific outcome and a list of variables thought to have impact on that outcome. By running a series of mathematical tests, a regression model can determine the likelihood that a variable, or group of variables, effects the outcome. It also tests the relationship between each of the variables included in the model, known as controlling, to ensure that the interaction between two variables is understood. Regression modeling is a powerful tool used for predicting outcomes.

Stepwise regression is a specific type of regression model incorporating elements of machine learning to help researchers create the best model possible in each data set. Our MCB case closure analysis relies on backwards stepwise regression. In backwards stepwise regression, all potential explanatory variables are considered within a model. The algorithm then removes variables from the model at random to understand how this impacts the overall model. Variables are removed until the algorithm arrives at the model that has the greatest explanatory power for the outcome variable used.

Our stepwise regression analysis examines all MCB case closures from 2017 to 2019 in the RSA 911 that resulted in either a successful or unsuccessful closure. We removed ineligible cases from our analysis as they are frequently determined by factors outside of MCB control and typically feature a large amount of incomplete or unknown data, factors that can confound analysis. In addition, we removed 10 records with large amounts of missing data. In total, we used 589 records to create this model.

Table 8 and Table 9 display the results of the stepwise regression analysis using a variety of demographic data reported by clients at time of entry into the MCB service system. We chose this method to identify profiles of individuals most and least likely to achieve successful outcomes when working with MCB. Variables are significant when they reach the 95% confidence interval, that is, a p-value <0.05. Items are labeled protective factors when they represent a factor that should have a positive influence on achieving a positive outcome and risk factors when they decrease the likelihood of a successful case closure. Non-significant variables are those that do not predict success but have an impact on the overall model so must be controlled for.

Table : Stepwise Regression Analysis Results – Protective Factors

| **Factor** | **Coefficient** | **p value** | **Significance** | **Factor** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Primary Support at Application: Personal Income | 0.25 | 0 | Significant | Protective |
| Highest Grade Completed: 8th | 0.29 | 0 | Significant | Protective |
| Highest Grade Completed: 6th | 0.67 | 0.02 | Significant | Protective |
| General Assistance at Application | 0.41 | 0.04 | Significant | Protective |
| Affordable Care Act Exchange at Application | 0.13 | 0.05 | Significant | Protective |
| Highest Grade Completed: 7th | 0.38 | 0.06 | Not Significant | Protective |
| Student with a Disability | 0.36 | 0.09 | Not Significant | Protective |
| Homeless | 0.4 | 0.11 | Not Significant | Protective |
| English Learner | 0.07 | 0.13 | Not Significant | Protective |
| Highest Grade Completed: 9th | 0.17 | 0.14 | Not Significant | Protective |
| Referral Source: Veteran's Benefit Administration | 0.54 | 0.16 | Not Significant | Protective |

Table : Stepwise Regression Analysis Results - Risk Factors

| **Factor** | **Coefficient** | **p value** | **Significance** | **Factor** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Highest Education: None completed | -0.33 | 0 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Long Term Unemployed | -0.23 | 0 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Highest Education: Some college, no certificate or degree | -0.2 | 0 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Significance of Disability: Significant | -0.19 | 0 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Highest Education: Secondary school equivalency | -0.61 | 0 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Low Income | -0.11 | 0.02 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Highest Grade Completed: None | -0.5 | 0.02 | Significant | Risk Factor |
| Referral Source: Medical Health Provider | -0.08 | 0.05 | Not Significant | Risk Factor |
| Referral Source: Welfare Agency | -0.18 | 0.08 | Not Significant | Risk Factor |
| Race: Black | -0.33 | 0.1 | Not Significant | Risk Factor |
| Race: Asian | -0.3 | 0.12 | Not Significant | Risk Factor |
| Race: White | -0.28 | 0.14 | Not Significant | Risk Factor |
| Highest Education: Secondary school diploma | -0.08 | 0.16 | Not Significant | Risk Factor   |

Regression analysis results show that hitting major educational milestones, such as completing grade levels beyond elementary education, are significant factors in case success. Failing to achieve certain education milestones – even those at a lower level – reduces the likelihood of a successful outcome. For example, having some college education but not achieving a degree significantly reduces the likelihood of a successful employment outcome, but having an eighth grade education improves it. Achieving educational milestones at any level may be as important to achieving successful employment as the actual level of education achieved.

# Analysis

In this section we analyze our closed case findings using the results of our Consumer Survey, RSA 911 case management data (decision tree, stepwise regression analysis) and focus groups and interviews.

The largest differences in our Consumer Survey between consumers whose cases were open and those whose cases were closed was consumers’ experience with MCB counselors. Across the entire range of MCB counselor questions, those with closed cases were, on average, less likely to report a positive experience with MCB counselors by 19.3-percentage points. Consistency across these questions suggests there is a meaningful difference in consumer experience. Those who feel their counselor does not listen to them, respect them, or take the time to regularly communicate with them in a timely manner may be less likely to continue working with MCB.

Table : Matrix Highlighting Survey Results – Closed Cases

| **Survey Topic** | **Survey Highlights - Question** | **Survey Highlights - Answer** | **Topic Summary** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| MCB Services | I receive services in a place that is convenient for me. | * Only 70.1% of closed cases agreed vs. 88.7% of open cases (-18.6% difference).
 | * Fewer than half of closed cases agreed with the majority of propositions.
* Open cases agreed at a higher rate than closed cases for all MCB services questions.
 |
| I helped develop my plan or IPE. | * Only 31.5% of closed cases agreed vs. 55.0% of open cases (-23.5% difference).
 |
| Experience with Counselors | My counselor informed me of my rights during the VR process. | * Only 44.2% of closed cases agreed vs. 66.9% of open cases (-22.8% difference).
 | * Open cases agreed at a higher rate than closed cases for all MCB services questions.
 |
| My counselor considered my interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing my rehabilitation plan. | * Only 45.5% of closed cases agreed vs. 70.1% of open cases (-24.6% difference).
 |
| Barriers to Job | Transportation | * Among closed cases, transportation was reported as a barrier almost twice as often as the next most common barrier.
* 69.1% of closed cases and 61.0% of open cases reported transportation as a barrier.
 | * Overall, respondents whose cases were closed reported facing similar barriers to respondents whose cases are open, though often at different rates.
* Consistency across open and closed cases is seen in other most commonly reported barriers; resources for people with disabilities, potential loss of benefits (“benefits cliff”), poor job markets and a lack of opportunities to explore careers.
 |
| Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities | * 38.2% of closed cases and 49.0% of open cases reported employer attitudes as the next most common barrier.
 |
| Community Partners / Service Provider Usage | Carroll Center for the Blind | 43.2% of closed cases reported using this partner vs. 47.2% of open cases. | * Closed cases were slightly less likely than open cases to report the use of a community partner (all differences fell within the expected rate of error).
* Respondents using a community partner rated how well MCB coordinated services (scale of 1-4). The average score was 3.3 among all cases and a 3.0 among closed case.
 |
| MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) | 29.7% of closed cases reported using this partner vs. 36.1% of open cases. |
| Perkins School for the Blind | 29.7% of closed cases reported using this partner vs. 33.3% of open cases. |
| Support Services Provided by MCB or Community Partners | Independent Living skills training | Closed case living skills training services usage – 9.9% for MCB services and 6.6% for community partners services and open case living skills training services usage – 12.9% forMCB services and 14.2% for community partner services. | * The largest discrepancy in supportive services provided (by both MCB and community partner providers) was independent living skills training
* Respondents whose cases were open were more likely to report receiving both of these services than those whose cases had been closed.
* Transportation was the most commonly reported support service received, though by a notably lower portion of all cases than those that encountered it as a barrier to employment.
 |
| Help with transportation | Closed case transportation services usage – 11.0% for MCB services and 9.9% for community partners services and open case transportation services usage – 15.7% forMCB services and 20.9% for community partner services. |

Among closed cases, transportation was reported as a barrier in our survey almost twice as often (69.1%) as the next most common barrier, employer attitudes toward people with disabilities (reported by 38.2% of closed cases and 49.0% of open cases).

Other than transportation and consumers’ experience with MCB counselors, survey results displayed few differences between closed and open cases in the use of MCB provided services or community partner provided services.

Decision tree results suggest the most powerful factor for determining successful employment is having a job at the time of case opening. Cases where individuals have primary support of personal income are much more likely to close successfully. While more than three quarters (79%) of these cases close successfully, less than half (43%) of individuals who do not have a job at the time MCB opens their case do. Individuals who are employed at the time their MCB case is opened have likely already developed a suite of skills, technological adaptions and personal traits that contribute to their success, making competitive integrated employment easier to achieve and maintain. MCB may want to focus on finding ways to impart these skills to those who are unemployed at the time their case is opened and/or during the time they are active with MCB.

Similarly, regression analysis results indicate that the factor most likely to determine a successful MCB case closure is when an individual’s primary source of support at the time of application is personal income i.e. they already have a job. Individuals with low levels of education, the most significant disabilities, who are long term unemployed or have low incomes are least likely to have a successful case closure. Interestingly, individuals receiving general assistance or private health insurance through the Affordable Care Act at the time of application are more likely to close with a successful outcome.

Focus groups noted the importance of having access to current technology, the funding to make upgrades and training consumers to become technically proficient and self-sufficient. These factors could make many more technology-oriented jobs – for example, most office jobs – more available to the blind and visually impaired.

O&M skills were seen by focus group participants as critical to the success of VR consumers and one of the central skills to focus on during service provision.

Individual characteristics such as “motivation”, “tenacity” and “self-advocacy” are also seen as vital to achieving successful, integrated employment outcomes.

Those who work with younger VR participants frequently emphasized parental involvement and coordination as important success factors, specifically helping their child create a plan for employment and achieving goals. Discussions also touched upon helping younger individuals build the personal and emotional skills necessary for that development, in particular, independence and self-advocacy skills.

Another important factor emphasized by all providers, including youth service providers, was the inaccessibility of transportation, a limiting factor to achieving employment. Our research suggests that transportation, orientation and mobility services should become an area of greater focus for MCB. Less than half of MCB consumers agreed they could access MCB offices using public transportation and only about a third agree they could easily navigate to MCB offices, particularly consumers farther away from major population centers. Those with closed cases were notably more likely to indicate difficulty accessing transportation (public or other) to navigate to MCB offices. Survey respondents expressed transportation barriers in multiple ways, including difficulty commuting to and from MCB offices (although MCB client seldom, if ever, need to visit MCB offices to receive services; staff appointments take place in clients’ homes or workplaces) and as a broader need for transportation services throughout the Commonwealth.

# Recommendations/Action Steps

In this section we present our recommendations for addressing the findings identified throughout this report.

## Increase Access to Transportation Services

Throughout this evaluation and report, transportation was identified as a barrier to employment. Transportation is the most commonly cited barrier for all MCB consumer cases, both open and closed. It is also an area identified as an important need by staff, service providers and TVI. In open ended responses and focus groups, individuals mentioned their positive experience with a ride-share pilot program. PCG recommends that MCB explore innovative ways to expand transportation options. This may allow cases that would otherwise close to continue receiving services. It may also help consumers expand their field of job opportunities, resulting in an increase in successful case closures.

“The Ride’s Uber pilot program is a life changer!” – MCB consumer

“Help with MBTA pilot program with Lyft and Uber” – MCB consumer

***Call to Action:***

1. Explore ways to develop innovative transportation solutions, such as expanding MCB’s ride-share pilot program and staying abreast of developments in the autonomous vehicle marketplace.
2. Determine how to coordinate innovative transportation solutions with other state agencies, such as evaluating and revising policies and practices to increase access for those seeking to use transportation services.
3. Work with community partners to develop alternative approaches to accessing transportation. Determine how to leverage resources and partnerships to meet local labor needs.
4. Consider alternative approaches to subsidizing transportation. In some communities, private partners fund transportation or reduced costs of transportation networks.
5. Review O&M services to ensure they are meeting the needs of consumers who need to access transportation.

## Improve Mobility and Orientation Services

PCG recommends MCB examine access to – and application of – mobility and orientation services and the accessibility of service delivery. The need for increased access to O&M services was a theme across multiple modes of data collection. PCG recommends that MCB evaluate the circumstances under which mobility and orientation services are included in an IPE to determine how these services could be provided to meet additional or alternative needs. MCB should also examine the process for acquiring available resources for O&M training to determine if additional resources may be beneficial. Increasing consumers’ ability to navigate a wide range of circumstances could expand their employment options. Greater employment options could lead to more opportunities for successful employment and increase the likelihood cases are closed successfully.

***Call to Action:***

1. Conduct thorough review and evaluation of current suite of MCB O&M services:
	* Access to – and application of – mobility and orientation services
	* Accessibility of service delivery
	* Circumstances under which mobility and orientation services are included in an IPE to and whether these services could be modified to meet additional or alternative needs
	* Process for acquiring available resources for O&M training to determine if additional resources may be beneficial

## Prepare for a Technology First Future

Continued advancements in technology have provided individuals with and without disabilities increased access to employment. PCG is currently conducting research into the most essential job duties of successful MCB case closures using some of the data sources analyzed in this report. Our research has revealed a trend towards technology-forward jobs in work-from-home settings among MCB consumers. This trend is likely to accelerate in the future. PCG recommends that MCB further explore the current technology needed to make these jobs maximally accessible to consumers and ways to incentivize / partner with more employers to hire blind or visually impaired consumers. These types of jobs that are likely to nullify many of the barriers that closed cases experience most acutely, such as transportation and O&M issues.

***Call to Action:***

1. Conduct detailed evaluation of how technology may impact services and opportunities for the agency and job seekers. Consider whether current practices and policies should be updated for:
	* Assistive technology
	* Skills and tools needed by job seeker
	* Trends in the job market
2. Train staff on the availability and operation of remote access technologies such as virtual conferencing and meeting software, cloud information storage and collaboration technologies, search engine use, and virtual scheduling tools.
3. Expand access to and support the use of these remote access technology tools among MCB consumers.
4. Expand virtual service delivery on an ongoing basis to increase MCB consumers’ access to services and employment opportunities while mitigating transportation issues and physical barriers.

## Identify and Address Barriers to Completing Educational Milestones

Attaining educational milestones may be as important as reaching a particular educational level for MCB consumers. Successfully completing lower levels of education increases the likelihood of employment, while unfinished, higher levels of education decreases the likelihood of employment. Focusing on providing services and resources (for example, financial, O&M, advocacy and adaptive technology) that help MCB consumers complete their education goals and achieve education milestones may help improve closure outcomes. In addition, MCB should consider whether further vocational counseling and guidance could help MCB consumers determine whether postsecondary education will actually help them attain their desired career goals versus just completing the next step in the expected education process. Once a consumer identifies postsecondary education as a path to a desired career (assuming a good fit), then determining the skills and supports needed to complete postsecondary education could be an additional area for MCB focus and emphasis.

***Call to Action:***

1. Evaluate whether further vocational counseling and guidance could help MCB consumers determine whether postsecondary education will actually help them attain their desired career goals.
2. For consumers who identify postsecondary education as a path to a desired career, determine the skills and supports needed for them to successfully complete their postsecondary education.
3. Identify services and resources that help MCB consumers complete their education goals and achieve education milestones at all levels of education. Evaluate whether current suite of MCB services requires changes / augmentation to help consumers achieve these goals.

## Evaluate Case Status and Services for MCB Youth

As discussed earlier, transition-aged youth receiving MCB services very rarely close into integrated employment. Like their peers who do not experience disability, transition aged youth receiving MCB services are more likely to pursue post-secondary education. This misalignment between a consumer’s goals (transition-aged youth matriculating to post-secondary education) and RSA’s definition of a successful case closure may limit the perception of success.

MCB’s consumer base is extremely broad. Our research indicates that the traditional definition of ‘successful closure’ may not fully accommodate the entire spectrum of individuals served by MCB. Transition-aged youth enrolled in Pre-ETS services who, in order to meet their career goals, choose to continue their education beyond high school and not begin working should be considered a successful outcome by both MCB and the student. However, there is currently no RSA 911 case exit reason that accurately captures these youth as a successfully closed case.

PCG conducted research into the feasibility of internship and apprenticeship opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Considering the strong link between personal/employment income and successful case closure, MCB should consider implementing recommendations outlined in this report to help transition-aged youth secure labor market experience at earlier ages. See the Feasibility of Apprenticeships in Emerging Industries for Blind VR Consumers report for more details on ways MCB can increase internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

***Call to Action:***

1. Implement recommendations outlined in PCG’s Feasibility of Apprenticeships in Emerging Industries for Blind VR Consumers report. PCG recommends further exploring internship and apprenticeship as a training, employment, and career pathway strategy for MCB consumers involved in the labor force.
2. Implement recommendations outlined in PCG’s Pre-ETS Needs Assessment report. PCG recommends ways for MCB to increase youth participation in Pre-ETS services.
3. Evaluate MCB processes for documenting the services and case closures of transition-aged youth, both internally and externally through legislation, to broaden the definition of a successful case closure to include outcomes beyond just integrated employment (such as continuing education).
4. Increase parental involvement and coordination to help their child create a plan for employment, achieving educational goals, etc.
5. Help younger individuals build the personal and emotional skills necessary for development, particularly independence and self-advocacy skills.

# Conclusion

This report explored the factors that increase the likelihood of a successful case closure and the risks that make it more likely that a case will close unsuccessfully. Cases with primary support of personal income are much more likely to close successfully. Access to current technology and mobility and orientation skills are important drivers of case success while lack of transportation is the primary barrier to successful case closure.

Our recommendations highlight areas for further research and examination that complement MCB’s already considerable investment in staff, advocacy, resources and knowledge. We outline concrete action steps that MCB can take to immediately leverage their considerable strengths to improve outcomes for both the youth and adult consumers they serve, and continue moving the field forward in improving employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

# Appendices

## Definitions

### Case Closure Status

The RSA’s 911 data report contains a variety of case closure outcomes. For predictive analysis, PCG has collapsed these into a smaller number of similar outcomes. These outcomes – ineligible, closed successfully and closed unsuccessfully – are defined below.

***Ineligible*** cases are those cases with a closure reason largely beyond MCB’s ability to intervene in. These include closure reasons such as institutionalization, health/medical reasons, death, or findings of ineligibility for services. It also includes individuals who exited MCB services before a finding of eligibility was determined, no matter their reason for closure.

***Closed Successful*** cases are exclusively those cases closed with a closure reason of achieving competitive, integrated employment.

***Closed Unsuccessful*** are cases closed for all other reasons, including extended unemployment, falling out of contact with MCB, or lack of interested in MCB services. These include only cases in which a finding of eligibility was determined.

Table 11 displays the specific closure reasons documented in the RSA 911 data provided, and the final categorization of cases.

Table : Case Closure Reasons

| **RSA Case Exit Reason** | **Closed Successful** | **Closed Unsuccessful** | **Ineligible** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Institutionalized | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Health/Medical | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Death of individual | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Ineligible | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| No disabling condition | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| No impediment to employment | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Does not require VR service | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Disability too significant to benefit from services | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Transferred to another agency | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Achieved competitive integrated employment outcome | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Extended unemployment | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% |
| Unable to locate or contact | 0.0% | 69.1% | 30.9% |
| No longer interested in receiving services | 0.0% | 82.6% | 17.4% |
| Residence in an institutional setting other than a prison or jail | 0.0% | 63.2% | 36.8% |
| Total | 41.4% | 32.8% | 25.8% |

A small group of cases within the case management data had at some point left VR services with a closure status and later opened a new case (some of which had then closed). We considered these cases differently in our different analyses. Because our demographic analysis sought to describe the population served by MCB, we considered the most recent case closure of records with the same ID number. We eliminated all prior iterations from our analysis so that multiple entries describing a single individual do not present a misleading description of MCB’s service population. We considered all case closures for our outcomes analysis, including those who may be working with MCB following a prior case closure.

Though prior experience working with MCB may factor into the likelihood of a case closing successfully, cases with multiple closure results were not common enough within the data set for PCG to perform a meaningful analysis.

## Decision Tree

Figure 2: Decision Tree Analysis



Table : Definition of Variables in Decision Tree Nodes

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable Name** | **Definition** | **0** | **1** |
| PrimarySupportatApp\_1 | Cases primary support at application is personal income | No | Yes |
| Age | Case age | NA | NA |
| OtherPrivate InsuranceatApp | Case has private insurance not provided through an employer or the ACA Exchange | No | Yes |
| EnglishLeaner | Case is an English Language Learner | Does not meet ELL definition | Meets ELL definition |
| SSDIatApp | Case has income from Social Security Disability Insurance at application | No | Yes |
| MedicaidatApp | Case has insurance through Medicaid/MassCare at application | No | Yes |

## Consumer Survey Instrument

### Introduction

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) wants to learn more about the experiences and needs of individuals with visual impairment. This information will be used to improve services and guide MCB decisions. Your answers are confidential. Your answers will only be reported after being combined with other individuals who respond. Your answers will not impact any current or future services.

We want you to complete this survey because you received services from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.

Public Consulting Group is conducting this survey. If you have questions about this survey or need accommodation or help completing this survey, please contact MA\_MCB\_VR\_Research@pcgus.com or 1-888-314-0710.

This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete.

You may skip any question you don’t want to answer. If you have worked with MCB many times, tell us know about your most recent time.

If you take this survey on behalf of someone else, please answer these questions as if you were them. We are most interested in the experiences and views of participants. Please try to respond through their view as much as you can.

### Survey Instrument

Demo08

Are you completing this survey yourself, or are you responding on behalf of a person with a visual impairment?

1 I am completing the survey independently

2 I am completing this survey on behalf of a person with disabilities who received services from Vocational Rehabilitation. My relationship to them is: [OPEN TEXT]

MCB Services

Services01

The following questions ask you about the services you received from MCB. Please let us know how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. You can also say you’re unsure if you don’t know, or if you feel the question doesn’t apply to you.

I receive MCB services in a convenient place.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services02

I can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services03

I can get around easily in MCB offices.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services04

The MCB office is open at times that work for me.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services05

MCB provided the accommodations I needed to receive services. For example, meetings scheduled at a time I could attend, large print, help filling out forms, or interpreters.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services06

MCB provided me with the technology or equipment I needed to receive services. For example, talk-to-text software, a mobility device, or a communication device.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services09

I received the testing or assessments I needed.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services10

I helped develop my plan or IPE (Individual Plan for Employment).

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Service12

Were there any services you needed from MCB that were not provided to you?

1 Yes (What were these services? [OPEN TEXT])

2 No

Service13

What else would you like to add about the services you received from MCB?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

MCB Counselor

Next, we would like to know more about your experiences with your counselor. Please let us know how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. You can also say you’re unsure if you don’t know, or if you feel the question doesn’t apply to you.

Experience01

My counselor explained why I was eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience02

My counselor helped me understand the sorts of careers I can pursue.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience03

My counselor respects my culture, background, and identity.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience04

My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience05

My counselor considered my interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing my rehabilitation plan.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience06

What else would you like us to know about working with your counselor?

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Barriers to Employment

The next set of questions ask about barriers to employment you may have faced. Please let us know if any of the following are barriers you have faced.

Barrier02a

What challenges have you faced with your basic needs while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance your career? Please select all that apply.

 1 Housing

 2 Transportation

3 Childcare

4 Food

5 Clothing

9 Some other basic need(s) (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

95 None

Barrier02b

What kinds of legal needs have you had while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance your career? Please select all that apply.

1 Criminal offenses

2 Immigration status

3 An ongoing discrimination case

9 Some other legal need (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

95 None

Barrier02c

What kinds of financial needs have you had while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance your career? Please select all that apply.

 1 Potential loss of benefits

 2 More money

 3 Educational or training funding

4 Benefits counseling

 5 Additional benefits (medical coverage, dental coverage)

 6 Resources for people with disabilities

9 Some other financial need (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

95 None

Barrier02d

What job-related challenges have you had while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance your career? Please select all that apply.

 1 Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities

 3 Poor job market or a lack of opportunities

 4 Limited relevant job skills

 5 Limited work experience

 6 Lack of opportunities to explore careers

9 Some other job-related need (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

95 None

Barrier03

While you were working with MCB, do you feel like staff treated you with respect regarding your culture, background, and identity?

 1 Yes

 2 No (Specify: Tell me more? [OPEN TEXT])

 9 Unsure

Barrier04

What other barriers or challenges have you faced while trying to work with MCB?

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

PreEts01

[ASK IF AGE <=21; ELSE EMPSER01]

The following questions ask about services that students are offered to explore and prepare for employment in their future. For each question, please answer yes or no. If you answer no, please let us know whether you do or do not need that service.

Have you received counseling to help you explore what kind of careers you might want to pursue?

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts02

Have you learned more about careers by visiting workplaces or trying out different types of jobs? Examples include job shadowing, apprenticeships, internships, volunteering, or work experiences.

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts03

Have you received counseling on your choices for education after high school ends?

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts04

Have you received training to get the skills you need to succeed at work? This could include any skill you need to get and keep a job. This includes social skills like asking questions or work skills.

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts05

Have you received training in self-advocacy?

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts06

[IF PREETS01-05 ALL >=2 GO TO PARTNER01]

While you were getting these services were you in… (select all that apply)

 1 A community-based setting, with some people with disabilities and some people without

 2 A school classroom

 3 A facility that only helps people with disabilities

PreEts06

Have you attended other classes or workshops for people interested in work?

1 Yes (SPECIFY: What were these? [OPEN TEXT])

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreETS08

What else would you like us to know about Pre-ETS?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

Community Service Partners

Partner01

MCB often works with partners and groups in the community to make sure you have the support you need to go to work. The next questions ask about services you may have received from these groups. Questions also ask about how working together helped you.

Please let us know if you are receiving services from any of the following vocational rehabilitation partners. Please select all that apply.

10 Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

11 Department of Developmental Services

12 Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

13 Department of Public Health

14 Department of Elder Services

15 MassHealth (Office of Medicaid)

17 Department of Veteran’s Services

18 Massachusetts Office on Disability

21 Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation

22 Department of Education (K-12)

23 Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities)

24 Carroll Center for the Blind

25 Perkins School for the Blind

95 Someone else (Who was that?)

97 None of the above [SKIP TO SUPPORT01]

99 Unsure

Partner02a-l

[ASK OF ALL GROUPS SELECTED IN PARTNER01]

How well did MCB and [INSERT GROUP NAME] coordinate services for you?

1 Very well

2 Somewhat well

3 Not very well

4 Not at all well

9 Unsure

Partner03

When thinking of the community partners you worked with, what went well?

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Partner04

When thinking of the community partners you worked with, what do you think could be improved?

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Support Services

Support01

Sometimes individuals need supports to be successful in work. MCB provides some of these services, using MCB counselors and staff or in MCB offices. Did MCB provide you with any of these services? Select all that apply to you.

 11 Family and/or caregiver support

 12 Group and peer support

 13 Help with housing

 14 Independent living skills training

 16 Social security benefits counseling

 17 Moving from a group home facility to independent living

 18 Help with transportation

 95 Something else (SPECIFY: What was that? [OPEN TEXT])

 97 None of these

 99 Unsure

Support02

Sometimes, MCB connects people with other organizations to help them get the supports they need. Please let us know if MCB has helped you get connected to any of the services below. Select all that apply to you.

 11 Family and/or caregiver support

 12 Group and peer support

 13 Help with housing

 14 Independent living skills training

 15 Medical care

 16 Social security benefits counseling

 17 Moving from a group home facility to independent living

 18 Help with transportation

 95 Something else (SPECIFY: What was that? [OPEN TEXT])

 97 None of these [GO TO MHS01]

 99 Unsure

Support03

What else would you like us to know about the support services MCB helped to connect you with?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

Mental Health Services

MHS01

Sometimes individuals need supports related to mental and emotional health to be successful in work. If MCB helped you get any of the services below, please select them.

 10 Behavioral supports (services from a behavior analyst, or using a behavior plan)

 11 Mental health treatment (for example, counseling)

 12 Substance use treatment

 95 Something else (SPECIFY: What was that? [OPEN TEXT])

 97 None of these [GO TO FINAL04]

99 Unsure

MHS02

What else would you like us to know about the mental health services MCB helped to connect you with?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final Questions

Final01

How has Massachusetts Commission for the Blind vocational rehabilitation services improved your ability to get a job, keep a job, or find the right job?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final02

What about working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind has gone well?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final03

What is one thing you would change about working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind?

 1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final04

Is there anything else you would like to add about the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind or its services?

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Tell Us About You

Demo01

What sex were you assigned at birth?

1 Male

2 Female

9 I’d prefer not to say

Demo01a

What gender do you currently identify as?

1 Male

2 Female

3 Other (What do you prefer? [OPEN TEXT])

9 I’d prefer not to say

Demo01b

Do you identify yourself as identify yourself as …?

 1 Straight

2 Gay

3 Lesbian

4 Bisexual

5 Other: [OPEN TEXT])

6 Not applicable

Demo03

Do you have a tribal affiliation?

1 Yes (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

2 No

9 I’d prefer not to say

Demo04

What language do you mostly speak at home?

10 English

11 Spanish

12 Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese)

13 Vietnamese

14 Russian

15 American Sign Language

95 Something else (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Demo09

What are you currently doing? Please select all that apply to you.

10 Working full time

11 Working part time

12 Going to school or in training

13 Retired

95 Something else (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

## Community Partners Survey

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is conducting a statewide assessment of the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with visual impairments in Massachusetts. As part of this, we are working to gather input from community partners that support individuals with disabilities. Your input will help us understand how well vocational rehabilitation services assist individuals with disabilities in achieving their employment goals and ways MCB services could improve.

We appreciate your participation in this survey. This should take about X minutes to complete. You may skip any question you don’t want to answer.

Public Consulting Group is conducting this survey. If you have questions about this survey or need accommodation or help completing this survey, please contact MA\_MCB\_VR\_Research@pcgus.com or call 1-888-314-0710.

Your Organization

Org01

What type of organization do you work for?

1 For-profit service provider agency

2 Non-profit service provider agency

3 Advocacy organization

4 Government organization

5 Independent consultant

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Org02

What is your role in this organization? Please select the one that is most appropriate for you.

1 Administrative staff (Executive, manager)

2 Direct services staff (e.g. supervisor, frontline workers staff)

3 Independent contractor

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Org03

Which of the following groups of people with disabilities does your organization work with? People with… (Please select all that apply)

10 Blindness and visual disabilities

11 Deafness and hearing loss

12 Intellectual and/or developmental disabilities

13 Communication disabilities

14 Manipulation

15 Mobility

16 Respiratory disabilities

17 Brain injury

18 Mental health disabilities

19 Substance use disorder

95 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

97 Unsure

Org04

What field does your organization work with? Please select all that apply.

10 Benefits counseling

11 Child welfare

12 Education

13 Employment

14 Healthcare services

15 Housing

16 Independent living

17 Law enforcement

18 Mental health services

20 Substance use

21 Transportation

22 Tribal services

95 Other (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Org05

Does your organization specialize in serving any of the following groups of people with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

1 People with the most significant disabilities

2 People with disabilities from racial, cultural, or ethnic minority groups

3 Youth and students with disabilities transitioning to adulthood (e.g. age 14-21)

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

9 Our organization does not specialize in working with any of these groups of people

Org06

Which counties do you serve? Please select all that apply.

10. Barnstable 23. Middlesex

11. Berkshire 24. Nantucket

12. Bristol 25. Norfolk

13. Dukes 26. Plymouth

14. Essex 27. Suffolk

15. Franklin 28. Worchester

16. Hampden 29. Entire state [EXCLUSIVE]

17. Hampshire

MCB (VR)

VR01

Are you familiar with the vocational rehabilitation services offered by Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)?

1 Yes

2 No [GO TO COLLAB01]

VR02

The following questions ask you about the MCB services individuals with disabilities you work with may receive. Please let us know how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. You can also say you’re unsure if you don’t know, or if you feel the question isn’t relevant to you. [RADIO BUTTONS, MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE]

A. The individuals I work with receive MCB services in a convenient place.

B. MCB provides the individuals I work with the accommodations needed for services. For example, meetings scheduled at a time I could attend, large print, helped me fill out forms, or provided interpreters.

C. MCB provides the individuals I work with the technology or equipment needed to receive services. For example, talk to text software or a communication device

D. Individuals that I work with receive the testing or assessments they need.

E. Individuals I work with help to develop their own IPE (Individual Plan for Employment).

Collab01

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:

MCB collaborates successfully with my organization to support people with visual impairments in achieving their employment goals.

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Agree

4 Strongly agree

9 Don’t know

VR04

What are the most important services offered by MCB? [OPEN TEXT]

VR05

What is the most important change that MCB could make to help individuals with visual impairments achieve their employment goals? [OPEN TEXT]

VR03

What other thoughts do you have about the services MCB provides? [OPEN TEXT]

Capacity of Community Rehabilitation Providers

VR provides a number of services through organizations, that might be called vendors, providers, or community rehabilitation providers, to deliver required services that help individuals get, keep, or maintain employment. Services are individualized and range from job placement to delivering a product that helps a person do their job. The following questions pertain to these providers who deliver services for VR.

Collab02

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The network of vocational rehabilitation service providers (i.e., contractors, vendors, and other providers) in my area meets most of the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities.

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Agree

4 Strongly agree

9 Unsure

Collab03

[ASK IF COLLAB02 <=2]

What are the primary reasons that vocational rehabilitation service providers in your area are generally unable to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

1 Low quality of provider services

2 Not enough providers available in area

4 The VR contracting process is difficult for vendors

5 Providers lack staff with skillsets to work with specific disabilities

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

8 Don’t know

9 N/A-Providers are meeting the needs of people with disabilities

Collab04

What other thoughts do you have about working with MCB service providers? [OPEN TEXT]

Pre-ETS Services

Pre-ETS01

We are particularly interested in learning about pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for students (age 14-21) with disabilities. Does your organization work with students transitioning from education to the workforce?

 1 Yes

 2 No [GO TO EMPREL01]

PreETS02

Please rate the quality of the following Pre-ETS services in your community. Please let us know if they are never adequate, are rarely adequate, are sometimes adequate, or are always adequate to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. [RADIO BUTTONS, MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE]

 Never adequate (1) Rarely adequate (2) Sometimes adequate (3) Always adequate (4) Unsure (9)

A. Job exploration counseling

B. Work-based learning experiences

C. Counseling on post-secondary education options

D. Workplace readiness training

E. Instruction in self-advocacy

F. Pre-employment transition coordination

PreETS03

[ASK OF THOSE RATING AT LEAST ONE SERVICE <=2 IN PreETS02]

You rated some of the Pre-ETS services in your community as inadequate. Please share why these services are inadequate. [OPEN TEXT]

PreETS04

What other services are needed by students with disabilities your organization works with to achieve their employment goals?

[OPEN TEXT]

Employment Related Supports

EmpRel01

Please rate the quality of the following employment related supports in your community. Please let us know if they are never adequate, are rarely adequate, are sometimes adequate, or are always adequate to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. [RADIO BUTTONS, MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE]

 Never adequate (1) Rarely adequate (2) Sometimes adequate (3) Always adequate (4) Unsure (9)

A. Vocational assessment

B. Vocational counseling

C. Technical training

D. Academic education

E. Vocational tuition assistance

F. Job placements

G. Job coaching

H. Self-employment supports

I. Post-employment services

EmpRel02

[ASK OF THOSE RATING AT LEAST ONE SERVICE <=2 IN EMPREL01]

You rated some of the employment-related support services in your community as inadequate. Please share why these services are inadequate. [OPEN TEXT]

EmpRel03

What other employment related services do you believe the individuals your organization works with need in order to find a job, keep a job, or advance their career? [OPEN TEXT]

Support Services

Support01

Please rate the quality of the following support services in your community. Please let us know if they are never adequate, are rarely adequate, are sometimes adequate, or are always adequate to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. [RADIO BUTTONS, MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE]

 Never adequate (1) Rarely adequate (2) Sometimes adequate (3) Always adequate (4) Unsure (9)

A. Referrals to community resources

B. Family and caregiver support

C. Group and peer support

D. Housing

E. Independent living skills training

F. Medical care

G. Social security benefit planning

H. Transition services from institution to community

I. Transportation

Support02

[ASK OF THOSE RATING AT LEAST ONE SERVICE <=2 IN SUPPORT01]

You rated some of the support services in your community as inadequate. Please share why these services are inadequate. [OPEN TEXT]

Support03

What other supportive services do you believe the individuals your organization works with need in order to find a job, keep a job, or advance their career? [OPEN TEXT]

Mental Health Needs

MHS01

Please rate the quality of the following mental health services in your community. Please let us know if they are never adequate, are rarely adequate, are sometimes adequate, or are always adequate to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. [RADIO BUTTONS, MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE]

 Never adequate (1) Rarely adequate (2) Sometimes adequate (3) Always adequate (4) Unsure (9)

A. Behavioral supports

B. Mental health treatment

C. Substance use treatment

MHS02

[ASK OF THOSE RATING AT LEAST ONE SERVICE <=3 IN MHS01]

You rated some of the mental health services in your community as inadequate. Why do you believe these services to be inadequate? [OPEN TEXT]

MHS03

What other mental health services do you believe the individuals your organization works with need in order to find a job, keep a job, or advance their career? [OPEN TEXT]

Group Needs

CSNAGroup01

[IF SERVE THE MOST SIGNIFICANTLY DISABLED IN ORG05]

Earlier, you indicated that you specialize in serving individuals with the most significant disabilities. What do you believe are the three most pressing needs in helping individuals with the most significant disabilities achieve their employment goals? [3 OPEN TEXT BOX]

CSNAGroup02

[IF SERVE MINORITY INDIVIDUALS IN ORG05]

Earlier, you indicated that you specialize in serving people with disabilities from racial, cultural, or ethnic minority groups. What do you believe are the three most pressing needs in helping individuals from racial, cultural or ethnic minority groups achieve their employment goals? [3 OPEN TEXT BOX]

CSNAGroup03

[IF SERVE YOUTH IN ORG05]

Earlier, you indicated that you specialize in serving students with disabilities who are transitioning to adulthood (i.e., 14 age to 21). What do you believe are the three most pressing needs in helping students transitioning to adulthood achieve their employment goals? [3 OPEN TEXT BOX]

Barriers to Achieving Employment Goals

Barrier01

What challenges do individuals with disabilities you work with frequently face with basic needs while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance their careers? Please select all that apply.

 1 Housing

 2 Transportation

3 Childcare

4 Food

5 Clothing

9 Some other basic need(s) (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Barrier02

What kinds of legal needs do individuals with disabilities you work with frequently face while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance their career? Please select all that apply.

1 Criminal offenses

2 Immigration status

3 An ongoing discrimination case

9 Some other legal need (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Barrier03

What kinds of financial needs do individuals with disabilities you work with frequently have while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance their careers? Please select all that apply.

 1 Potential loss of benefits

 2 Higher income

 3 Educational or training funding

 4 Benefits counseling

 5 Additional benefits (IF SELECTED: What sorts of benefits? [OPEN TEXT])

 6 Resources for people with disabilities

9 Some other financial need (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Barrier04

What job-related challenges do individuals you work with frequently have while trying to find a job, keep a job, or advance their careers? Please select all that apply.

 1 Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities

 3 Poor job market or a lack of opportunities

 4 Limited relevant job skills

 5 Limited work experience

 6 Lack of opportunities to explore careers

9 Some other job-related need (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Barrier05

Do you feel like MCB staff you’ve worked with treats individuals with disabilities with respect regarding their culture, background, and identity?

 1 Yes

 2 No (Specify: Tell me more? [OPEN TEXT])

 9 Unsure

Barrier06

What other challenges people with disabilities face to achieving their employment goals do you feel MCB should work to address? [OPEN TEXT]

Barriers07

The “unserved” population includes people with disabilities who are not receiving vocational rehabilitation services from MCB but are interested in working.

Which of the following groups of individuals with disabilities do you believe are most likely to be unserved? Please select all that apply.

10 People with intellectual disabilities

11 People with physical disabilities

12 People who are between the ages of 14 to 21

13 People who are racial or ethnic minorities

14 People with a mental health condition

15 People with substance use disorder

16 People who have criminal convictions

17 People who live in rural areas of the state

18 People who are LGBTQ+

19 People who are homeless

20 Veterans

21 People living in rural areas.

95 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

99 I believe all groups of individuals in Massachusetts are being adequately served [EXCLUSIVE]

Final Questions

Final01

How have VR services improved the ability of the individuals you work with to get a job, keep a job, or find the right job? [OPEN TEXT]

Final02

Is there anything else you’d like to add about the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind or its services? [OPEN TEXT]

Thank you!

Thank you very much for completing this survey! The results will be summarized in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. Your perspective as a vocational rehabilitation community partner is critical to that effort.

If there are other community partners who you think would be interested in completing this survey, please share the link below.

[SURVEY LINK]

## Moderator’s Guide: MCB VR Participants

Introduction Script

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is [NAME], and I am from [ORGANIZATION]. Today, I am working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind to learn more your experiences working with vocational rehabilitation. We will talk about how services helped you with employment, and if things could have been better. I will be the facilitator today. [NAME] is here to record and summarize your responses.

There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. We want to hear about your experiences no matter what they are.

We would like to hear from everyone. It is important that we treat each other with respect. Please let people finish speaking, and if you disagree with something someone says, remember that they are talking about their own experiences. You will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences too. It does not mean anyone is wrong if there are differences in opinions.

We are very interested in learning more about all of you and your experiences with MCB’s VR program. The information that you share will help us learn about what is working, what is not working, and what can be improved.

I would like you to know that we are recording this. This will allow us to have a more active discussion. Nothing you say here, positive or negative, will have an impact on services you receive. Your names will not be attached to anything that is provided to MCB.

Now, with all that out of the way, let us go around the Zoom room and introduce ourselves. Please share your first name and one thing about yourself that you think is important for us to know.

Thank you, it is nice to meet everyone. Now, all of you have worked with Vocational Rehabilitation at some point, or is working with them now, right? Or, you represent or support a person who has used Vocational Rehabilitation services?

Questions and Data Collection

1. Introduction to Services

Let’s get started. Think about the kinds of services you received from MCB’s Vocational Rehabilitation program. By services, I mean anything that MCB has helped you with. MCB helps people get different kinds of service based on what they need. It could be things like helping you obtain training or education, help with finding a job, or help getting assistive technology that helps you do your job. What stands out in your memory about the services you have received?

2. Strengths

What has been most helpful about the services you received when working with MCB?

3. Areas to Improve

When you received services from MCB, what could have been better?

4. Barriers

We have talked about things that can be better. When you have worked with MCB, did you experience any challenges or problems?

5. Solutions

What would make working with MCB easier or better?

6. Partners

We have been discussing Vocational Rehabilitation so far. Lots of people also receive services from other providers and community supports. Some examples are services from a CRP, housing, food, or medical assistance. Tell me more about other services you received that were important to you.

7. Coordination

Think about some of the other services you have received. Can you remember if MCB helped you get connected to the service? Or if they worked together?

8. Recommendations

Would you recommend MCB services to other individuals with disabilities?

9. Final Question

Is there anything you else you would like to share about your experience with MCB?

END

That was our last question. Thank you very much for participating in the focus group today. Do you have any questions?

## Moderator’s Guide: Pre-ETS Consumers

Introduction Script

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is [NAME], and I am from [ORGANIZATION]. Today, I am working with Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation to learn more your experiences related to work and getting ready for work. I will be the facilitator today. [NAME] is here to record and summarize your responses.

There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. We want to hear about your experiences no matter what they are.

We would like to hear from everyone. It is important that we treat each other with respect. Please let people finish speaking, and if you disagree with something someone says, remember that they are talking about their own experiences. You will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences too. It does not mean anyone is wrong if there are differences in opinions.

We are very interested in learning more about all of you and your experiences with VR. The information that you share will help us learn about what is working, what is not working, and what can be improved.

I would like you to know that we are recording this. This will allow us to have a more active discussion. Nothing you say here, positive or negative, will have an impact on services you receive. Your names will not be attached to anything that is provided to VR.

Now, with all that out of the way, let us go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please share your first name and one thing about yourself that you think is important for us to know.

Help participants go around the room to introduce themselves.

Questions and Data Collection

1. Introduction

Let’s get started. Many people work in the community. Some people work at a business in their community, and other people have their own business. Others might go on to additional school or training. Have you thought about your plans?

2. Vocational Rehabilitation

You are, or have, received Pre-Employment Transition Services, or Pre-ETS. In Pre-ETS, there are lots of skills you might learn to help you figure out what to do after high school. You may learn self-advocacy, explore different types of jobs or careers, or skills you need to be successful at work. You might also get experience in a workplace. Think a moment about the Pre-ETS services that you have received. What have been some of the most valuable or helpful activities or experiences?

3. Solutions

Are there something that could be better?

4. Other Programs

There are other programs that support students learning about work. One example is the Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD), Mentor Match, or Project LENS. Have you participated in this or other programs that help you learn about work?

5. Open Pre-ETS

Is there anything you else you would like to share about Pre-ETS services?

END

That was our last question. Thank you very much for participating in the focus group today. Do you have any questions?

## Moderator’s Guide: MCB VR Staff

Welcome and Introduction

[BEGIN RECORDING]

Hello, and thank you for joining me today. My name is [NAME] and I work for Public Consulting Group. Today, I’m working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind in order to learn more about your work with individuals with visual impairments, helping them become competitively employed, and some of the needs of the individuals you work with. I’m also working with [NAME] who is here to record and summarize your responses.

First, let’s get ourselves grounded. There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. We want to hear about your experiences and views no matter what they are. Everyone’s experiences, opinions, and needs will help shape our report and recommendations.

I want to stress that we would like to hear from everyone, and I request that everyone treat others with respect. Please let people finish speaking, and if you disagree with something someone says, remember that they are talking about their own experiences. You will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences as well. It does not mean anyone is wrong if there are differences in opinions or experiences.

I would like you to know that we are recording this. This will allow us to have a more active discussion, without having to take as many notes. The recordings of this discussion will never be provided directly to anyone at MCB. Nothing you say here, positive or negative, will have an impact on your employment. Your names will not be attached to anything said here.

Now, with all that out of the way, let us go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please share your first name, your role in MCB, and one thing about yourself that you think is important for us to know.

Q01 – Success Factors

Thank you, it is nice to meet everyone. Now I’d like to get our discussion started by thinking a little. I’d like you each to open up an application that you can use to take notes or write down your thoughts- something like Notepad, Word, or Pages would all be fine. Once you have that done, I’d like you each to take a moment and write down the three traits or attributes you think are most common among clients who you’ve worked with that achieve successful, competitive employment outcomes. Once everyone has those written down, we will go over your responses and have a conversation about them.

Q02 – Barriers and Challenges

Thanks so much for sharing your experience in what traits can lead to success of a job seeker. Through our research, we’re also interested in learning about barriers, or things that cause challenges or hurdles for individuals to get or keep work. We are interested in identifying and learning about barriers in order to assist job seekers in overcoming them. Just like with the last question, please take a moment and think about two or three of the greatest barriers or challenges your clients face in successfully gaining and maintaining employment. Once everyone has those written down, we will go over your responses and have a conversation about them.

Q03 - Unserved and Underserved Populations

One of the goals of the research we’re doing with MCB is to identify those groups which MCB has the most trouble working with. When I say ‘trouble working with’ I mean groups that MCB either doesn’t currently provide the best possible services to, or groups that don’t come to MCB for services at all. What groups do you think MCB could do a better job with, and why do you think they’re currently not being served well?

[TAKE NOTES PUBLICALLY]

Q04 – Underserved Solutions

Now, let’s take a minute to look at these groups we’ve identified and the traits you associated with the most successful outcomes. Considering both of these, what could MCB do in order to help those underserved groups better? What could be done to reach more of these people?

Q05 – Community Rehabilitation Providers

Another focus of our research is learning more about community rehabilitation providers within the state. One of our charges is to identify needs to establish, develop, or improve these programs. Please take a moment to think about your experience, and the experience of your clients who have participated in these programs. We’re interested in learning about their experience, as it relates to if the programs met their needs. For example,

- if the staff had the skills to serve them,

- if there were enough staff, and

- if they were served in a timely fashion.

Tell us about your experience, and your clients’ experience, with community rehabilitation providers.

END

Thank you very much for participating today. We so appreciate you sharing your experience, and your commitment to improving the MCB VR program. This is the end of the focus group. Do you have any questions?

## Moderator’s Guide: VR Service Providers

Welcome and Introduction

[BEGIN RECORDING]

Hello, and thank you for joining me today. My name is [NAME] and I work for Public Consulting Group. Today, I’m working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind in order to learn more about your work with individuals with visual impairments, helping them become competitively employed, and some of the needs of the individuals you work with. I’m also working with [NAME] who is here to record and summarize your responses.

First, let’s get ourselves grounded. There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. We want to hear about your experiences and views no matter what they are. Everyone’s experiences, opinions, and needs will help shape our report and recommendations.

I want to stress that we would like to hear from everyone, and I request that everyone treat others with respect. Please let people finish speaking, and if you disagree with something someone says, remember that they are talking about their own experiences. You will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences as well. It does not mean anyone is wrong if there are differences in opinions or experiences.

I would like you to know that we are recording this. This will allow us to have a more active discussion, without having to take as many notes. The recordings of this discussion will never be provided directly to anyone at MCB. Nothing you say here, positive or negative, will have an impact on your employment. Your names will not be attached to anything said here.

Now, with all that out of the way, let us go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please share your first name, your role at your organization, and one thing about yourself that you think is important for us to know.

Q01 – Success Factors

Thank you, it is nice to meet everyone. Now I’d like to get our discussion started by thinking a little. I’d like you each to open up an application that you can use to take notes or write down your thoughts- something like Notepad, Word, or Pages would all be fine. Once you have that done, I’d like you each to take a moment and write down the three traits or attributes you think are most common among clients who you’ve worked with that achieve successful, competitive employment outcomes. Once everyone has those written down, we will go over your responses and have a conversation about them.

Q02 – Barriers and Challenges

Thanks so much for sharing your experience in what traits can lead to success of a job seeker. Through our research, we’re also interested in learning about barriers, or things that cause challenges or hurdles for individuals to get or keep work. We are interested in identifying and learning about barriers in order to assist job seekers in overcoming them. Just like with the last question, please take a moment and think about two or three of the greatest barriers or challenges your clients face in successfully gaining and maintaining employment. Once everyone has those written down, we will go over your responses and have a conversation about them.

Q03 - Unserved and Underserved Populations

One of the goals of the research we’re doing with MCB is to identify groups that either don’t get served by MCB VR, or don’t get enough services from MCB VR. What groups do you think MCB could do a better job with, and why do you think they’re currently not being served well?

[TAKE NOTES PUBLICALLY]

Q04 – Unserved and Underserved Solutions

Now, let’s take a minute to look at these groups we’ve identified and the traits you associated with the most successful outcomes. What could MCB do to either improve services, or reach more individuals?

Q05 – Community Rehabilitation Providers

Another focus of our research is learning more about community rehabilitation providers within the state. One of our charges is to identify needs to establish, develop, or improve these programs. We’re interested in hearing what you think. We’re interested in learning about their experience, as it relates to if the programs meet their needs. For example,

- if the staff have the skills to serve client,

- if there are enough staff, and

- if clients are served in a timely fashion.

Tell us about your experience, and your clients’ experience.

END

Thank you very much for participating today. We so appreciate you sharing your experience, and your commitment to improving the MCB VR program. This is the end of the focus group. Do you have any questions?

## Moderator’s Guide: Pre-ETS Service Providers

Welcome and Introduction

[BEGIN RECORDING]

Hello, and thank you for joining me today. My name is [NAME] and I work for Public Consulting Group. Today, I’m working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind in order to learn more about your work with individuals with visual impairments, helping them become competitively employed, and some of the needs of the individuals you work with. I’m also working with [NAME] who is here to record and summarize your responses.

First, let’s get ourselves grounded. There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. We want to hear about your experiences and views no matter what they are. Everyone’s experiences, opinions, and needs will help shape our report and recommendations.

I want to stress that we would like to hear from everyone, and I request that everyone treat others with respect. Please let people finish speaking, and if you disagree with something someone says, remember that they are talking about their own experiences. You will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences as well. It does not mean anyone is wrong if there are differences in opinions or experiences.

I would like you to know that we are recording this. This will allow us to have a more active discussion, without having to take as many notes. The recordings of this discussion will never be provided directly to anyone at MCB. Nothing you say here, positive or negative, will have an impact on your employment. Your names will not be attached to anything said here.

Now, with all that out of the way, let us go around the Zoom room and introduce ourselves. Please share your first name, your role at your organization, and one thing about yourself that you think is important for us to know.

Q01 – Services Landscape

Thank you, it is nice to meet everyone. Now I’d like to get our discussion started by thinking a little. I’d like to learn a little bit about what Pre-ETS services look like for your organization. For example, the services you’re offering, where they are offered, and what’s going well.

Q02 – What’s Working Well

I’d like you each to take a moment and write down the three traits or attributes you think are most common among students who you’ve worked with that benefit from Pre-ETS. Once everyone has those written down, we will go over your responses and have a conversation about them.

Q03 – Barriers and Challenges

Thanks so much for sharing your experience in what traits can lead to beneficial Pre-ETS services. Through our research, we’re also interested in learning about barriers, or things that cause challenges or hurdles for students successfully participating in, and learning from Pre-ETS. We are interested in identifying and learning about barriers to figure out how to overcome them. Just like with the last question, please take a moment and think about two or three of the greatest barriers or challenges students face in receiving or benefiting from Pre-ETS. Once everyone has those written down, we will go over your responses and have a conversation about them.

Q04 - Unserved and Underserved Populations

One of the goals of the research we’re doing with MCB is to identify groups that either don’t get Pre-ETS, or don’t get enough Pre-ETS. What groups do you think MCB could do a better job with, and why do you think they’re currently not being served well?

[TAKE NOTES PUBLICALLY]

Q05 – Provider Capacity and Training

Another focus of our research is learning more about the needs of Pre-ETS providers. One of our charges is to identify needs to establish, develop, or improve these programs. We’re interested in hearing what you think. Sometimes providers need more staff, more training, or resources like technology. Do you feel like your program has the staff, training, and resources, to provide Pre-ETS as well as possible?

Q06 – Business/Community Engagement and Involvement

When providing Pre-ETS, we know that having strong business partners who collaborate to develop meaningful opportunities for students is key. Tell us about what’s working, and what could be better when it comes to working with businesses.

Q07 – Coordination

Along with businesses, coordination with the student’s school and special education services helps make Pre-ETS as productive as possible. Tell us about what’s working, and what could be better when it comes to coordinating with schools.

END

Thank you very much for participating today. We so appreciate you sharing your experience, and your commitment to improving the MCB VR program. This is the end of the focus group. Do you have any questions?

## Moderator’s Guide: Teachers of the Visually IMpaired

Introduction Script:

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is [NAME], and I am from [ORGANIZATION]. Today, I am working with Massachusetts Commission for the Blind to learn more your experiences with young people who are visually impaired and helping them prepare for life beyond school. I will be the facilitator today. [NAME] is here to record and summarize your responses.

There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. We want to hear about your experiences no matter what they are.

We would like to hear from everyone. It is important that we treat each other with respect. Please let people finish speaking, and if you disagree with something someone says, remember that they are talking about their own experiences. You will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences too. It does not mean anyone is wrong if there are differences in opinions.

We are very interested in learning more about all of you, your students and your experiences with MCB. The information that you share will help us learn about what is working, what is not working, and what can be improved.

I would like you to know that we are recording this. This will allow us to have a more active discussion. Nothing you say here, positive or negative, will have an impact on services you receive. Your names will not be attached to anything that is provided to VR.

Now, with all that out of the way, I’m going to go around the Zoom room and have you introduce yourselves. Please share your first name, your position, and one other thing you think it is important for us to know.

Help participants go around the room to introduce themselves.

Questions and Data Collection

1. Introduction

Let’s get started. The first thing I’d like to know is what most of the students you work with plan to do after they finish high school for instance, do they plan to continue their education, go straight into the workforce, or do something else?

2. Working with MCB

MCB provides a lot of services, including funding for continued education. Do most of the students you work with also work with MCB?

3. Reasoning

Of the students you work with who DON’T work with MCB, do you know why they do not? What keeps them from engaging with MCB’s resources?

4. Barriers

What barriers do your students experience when trying to achieve their goals? What prevents them from accomplishing them?

5. Programs

Students sometimes participate in different programs that help them prepare for life after school, or to address the barriers we have just discussed. These programs might be funded by your school, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, or other places. Some of the programs you may have heard about include Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD), Mentor Match, Project LENS, or Pre-ETS. Have the students you work with heard about or participated in any of these programs?

6. Open

We really appreciate your time and sharing your feedback today. Is there anything else you would like to share?

END

That was our last question. Thank you very much for participating in the focus group today. Do you have any questions?

## Stakeholder Interview Guide

Initial contact:

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) wants to improve employment for people with disabilities. On behalf of MCB, Public Consulting Group (PCG) is gathering data in a number of ways, including surveys and focus groups. To provide greater depth and context, we are also interviewing organizations and individuals who represent MCB’s key populations and stakeholders. We know that we are all working to improve services and outcomes for individuals with diverse disabilities. We would like to schedule 15-20 minutes with you, or a representative from your organization, so we can learn more about the employment-related needs of individuals you serve. Please let us know when you would be available for a conversation. We are aiming to complete our interviews by August 18, 2020.

Introduction Script:

Thanks so much for taking time to talk with me today. My name is Lea Vincent, and I am from Public Consulting Group, otherwise known as PCG. Today, I am working with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) to learn more your experiences working with vocational rehabilitation. I very much appreciate your time, and your willingness to share your perspective and knowledge on individuals your organization supports.

This information will be compiled with other interviews conducted, as well as other data sources, to provide a full picture into what employment-related services look like for individuals with disabilities. This will let us know what is going well and how things can be improved.

I have a few questions, but this is really a conversation. There are no right or wrong answers, and if you wish to skip a question, just let me know. I would also like to record this conversation so that I can go back and refer to it later in case I miss something in my notes. Is this okay?

1. What is the name of your organization, and what is your position there?

2. What populations does your organization primarily serve?

3. Tell me about how your organization supports or interacts with individuals with disabilities.

4. We are trying to learn about what works, and how to improve employment-related services for individuals with disabilities. What barriers do you see that the individuals with disabilities you work with are in gaining or maintaining employment?

5. Does your organization ever interact with MCB? If so, tell me more. How frequently?

6. How could MCB best work with your organization in order to overcome these barriers?

7. When your organization works with MCB, what works well?

8. What could be better?

9. Finally, do you have any final thoughts about MCB, working with individuals with disabilities, or ways that the employment-related services that you would like to share?

10. Are there any groups of individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts that you think are not getting the employment-related services they need? Tell me more about that.

11. How can MCB better serve individuals in those groups?

END

That was my last question. Thank you very much for participating in the focus group today. Do you have any questions?

1. Individuals who support MCB consumers include community partners staff members, teachers of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialists, and MCB staff members. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)