Massachusetts Commission for the Blind VR Research Initiatives 2020

Scope 1: Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Report

September 30, 2020

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# Executive Summary

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is a report that is required by the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) every three years. This Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) CSNA assesses the needs of individuals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who are blind or visually impaired in their pursuit of competitive employment. The CSNA seeks to effectively assess MCB consumer needs in order to advise MCB future policy and decision making so MCB can best serve their consumers and meet their rehabilitation needs.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) was established under Section 129 of Chapter 6 of the Massachusetts General Laws. MCB is the point of entry for vocational and social rehabilitation services for residents of the Commonwealth who are declared to be legally blind by an eye professional. People who have low vision and have been diagnosed with progressive visual impairments leading to legal blindness are also eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. MCB partners with local agencies, healthcare providers, employers, and clients’ relatives to provide services, including rehabilitation and social services and vocational assistance. These services help individuals to work toward independence and full community participation.

MCB has contracted with Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to assist with several related Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) research initiatives, including the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and other VR studies and needs assessments for a total of seven scopes of work. Relevant results from these studies and needs assessments have been included herein.

**Methodology**

PCG used multiple data sources to develop the analysis and recommendations within this report including:

* Secondary data sources (American Community Survey (ACS) 1- and 5-year estimates)
* Consumer and community partners surveys
* Key informant focus groups and interviews
* Case management data
* Qualitative analysis (personal experiences and stories)

**Findings**

PCG collected and analyzed data (as described in the methodology section) to assess the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Massachusetts. Overall, MCB consumers and stakeholders indicated that their MCB experience and services were positive, and that they felt valued. However, considerable barriers such as transportation, accessibility, and perceptions of individuals with disabilities were identified by many as inhibitors to job seeker success. PCG more closely examined the vocational rehabilitation services needs of target populations. These key findings are broken out by population and described below.

* 1. **Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services**: MCB has increased the rate and number of individuals with most significant disabilities over the past three years. Individuals with the most significant disabilities experience higher rates of successful case closure, higher wages, and higher average weekly work hours compared to individuals with significant disabilities.
	2. **Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program:** Individuals with disabilities who are minorities are served at rates at or higher than expected based on population projections. However, members of minorities groups with open cases report higher rates of barriers and lower rates of satisfaction with MCB experience and services compared to individuals who are not minorities. Members of minority groups experience successful case closure at lower rates compared to those who are not minorities. Finally, MCB consumers who are members of minority groups earn lower hourly wages and work a greater number of hours when compared to MCB consumers who are not minorities. Further research and analysis determined that the wage gap experienced by MCB consumers is smaller than the overall wage gap experienced by individuals who are minorities compared to those who are not minorities.

In addition to individuals who are minorities, there are several other groups that may be underserved. First, individuals who live in rural areas may be unserved or underserved. Both quantitative and qualitative data support this finding. Additionally, qualitative data indicates that individuals who have advanced degrees may not be served adequately through MCB’s VR system.

* 1. **Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system (other than the vocational rehabilitation program), as identified by such individuals and personnel assisting such individuals through the components**: MCB works in coordination and collaboration with MassHire and other WIOA partners. MCB and MassHire continue to increase their collaboration and coordination efforts to better serve individuals with disabilities who served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. While policy has been set, logistics and development continue.
	2. **Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services**: Data and results indicate that individuals who receive Pre-ETS are well-served and receive a wide variety of services. However, data also indicate that not all students who could benefit from these services are receiving them. Stakeholders indicate that communication, limitations in provider capacity, and transportation are some of the barriers to delivering Pre-ETS to a wider range of students.

PCG also **assessed the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services provided under this Act are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.) in order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.** In addition to the findings identified in (IV), findings indicate that PCG and DESE take many steps to coordinate and collaborate in policy and in practice. However, there may be certain areas, including rural areas, where communication and collaboration could improve. In addition, individuals with disabilities may benefit from the expansion of Pre-ETS and innovation in service delivery methods. Finally, it was found that the majority of Pre-ETS were delivered in the classroom or a setting not in the community. This finding aligns with survey results and stakeholder communication that indicates that youth with disabilities would benefit from community-based work experiences before exiting high school.

Finally, the CSNA must include an assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the Commonwealth. About one third of consumers indicated that they did not experience any gaps in service. However, a comparable number of respondents indicated that it took a long time to get a job. Of similar note, one in five respondents indicated that there were not enough staff. Additionally, members of minority groups reported larger gaps across all questions compared to their peers who are not minorities.

**Recommendations and a Call to Action**

In response to the findings identified within this report, PCG developed the following recommendations and associated “Call to Action” to indicate where MCB could take important steps to address the needs of its consumers. The recommendations are summarized below.

|  | **Recommendation** | **Call to Action** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | ***Improve Services and Outcomes for Individuals who are Minorities***Individuals who are minorities are less likely to agree that they had positive experiences with their VR counselors, a consistent finding across the set of counselor experience questions. They are less likely to have a successful case closure and earn lower wages on average.  | 1. Identify gaps in staff knowledge related to cultural responsivity, and responsive and inclusive service delivery.
2. Identify differences in service delivery that may contribute to less favorable outcomes.
3. Identify successful practices and staff who deliver culturally-responsive practices.
4. Develop a strategic training plan addressing identified knowledge and service gaps and leveraging staff strengths.
 |
| **2** | ***Expand Access for Rural Consumers***Focus groups, interviews, and open-ended comments all indicated that rural areas feel less well served than those in more urban areas. Resources may or may not be misallocated, but the *perception* of a difference in service level exists. MCB should investigate the reasons behind this perception to determine if there are communication or service delivery barriers. | 1. Learn more about perceptions and potential gaps in services for individuals living in rural areas.
2. Explore how technology can increase access of services and employment for individuals living in rural areas.
 |
| **3** | ***Improve Coordination and Service Delivery for Consumers with Diverse Employment Goals***Results and analysis indicate that MCB consumers are not frequently using MassHire services. Such coordination is required by WIOA. MCB should consider implementing continuous improvement processes to ensure that policy and practice specified in the Massachusetts State Plan effectively coordinates services under WIOA.  | 1. Implement policies and practices identified in 2020-2023 State Plan.
2. Implement and monitor continuous improvement processes to ensure effective coordination with MassHire.
 |
| **4** | ***Prepare for a Technology First Future***Continued advancements in technology have provided individuals with and without disabilities increased access to employment. Our research has revealed a trend towards technology-forward jobs in work-from-home settings among MCB consumers, a trend likely to accelerate. MCB should explore the 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 may nullify barriers such as transportation and M&O issues. | 1. Evaluate how technology may impact services and opportunities for MCB and job seekers. Consider updating practices and policies for:
* Assistive technology
* Skills and tools needed by job seeker
* Trends in the job market
1. Train staff on the availability and operation of remote access technologies.
2. Expand access to and support the use of remote access technology tools among MCB consumers.
3. Expand virtual service delivery on an ongoing basis to increase access to services and employment opportunities while mitigating transportation issues and physical barriers.
 |
| **5** | ***Increase Access and Reduce Barriers to Transportation***Consumers cited transportation as the biggest barrier to achieving their employment goals. Innovative transportation options do exist, such as the pilot on demand ride-sharing program. MCB should consider restarting or expanding this program. Advocating for the expansion of public transit options could benefit consumers as could expanding the availability of orientation and mobility services to help consumers better navigate existing public transportation options. MCB should consider how technology can help consumers work outside of traditional office settings. | 1. Work with public and private entities to identify mutually beneficial relationships that increase transportation opportunities that align with the labor market.
2. Train counselors, contractors, and consumers how to talk with potential employers about leveraging technology to increase their applicant pool and meet their labor needs.
 |
| **6** | ***Improve MCB Data Practices***PCG encountered several challenges and limitations with MCB data collection and management practices. First, MCB provided high-level, not detailed, service delivery case management data. This hindered our needs analysis. Second, case management systems data proved difficult to access, reducing our ability to contact individuals. Finally, we frequently encountered incomplete case management and service delivery data. | 1. Evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine ways to increase accuracy and consistency of data.
2. Explore the feasibility of, and opportunities to, enhance access of data and reporting to facilitate data-based decision making (focus on capturing, maintaining, and using data around service delivery).
 |

Below are recommendations and a Call to Action for improving outcomes specifically for youth with visual impairments.

|  | **Recommendation** | **Call to Action** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | ***Examine and Leverage Strengths***Analysis indicates MCB has considerable strengths, including partner coordination and VR counselor services that respect a student’s culture, background, and identity. MCB should examine these strengths to identify best practices and consider how they can be extended to other MCB areas. Leveraging these strengths is an opportunity to build capacity and improve service delivery in Massachusetts and on a national level. | 1. Identify and operationalize successful practices in coordination and culturally competent and person-centered service delivery.
2. Implement ways to increase coordination and collaboration that expand partnerships and access to a greater number of students.
 |
| **2** | ***Evaluate Case Status and Services for MCB Youth*** Transition-aged youth receiving MCB services very rarely close into integrated employment as many pursue post-secondary education. These youth 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. This misalignment may limit the perception of success. MCB should also consider ways to increase internship and apprenticeship opportunities for this population as there is a strong link between personal / employment income and successful case closure. | 1. Implement recommendations outlined in PCG’s Feasibility of Apprenticeships in Emerging Industries for Blind VR Consumers report. PCG recommends 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.
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.
4. Increase parental involvement and coordination to help children 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.
 |
| **3** | ***Leverage Technology to Increase Access and Overcome Barriers***Data indicates that geography and transportation limit access to Pre-ETS: transportation was cited as one of the most common barriers to service delivery. MCB should explore the delivery of virtual Pre-ETS to eligible students who may be impacted by these barriers. With continued challenges due to COVID-19, virtual Pre-ETS delivery is being explored across the country. MCB should also consider additional ways that Pre-ETS consumers can access transportation resources where virtual services may not be possible or appropriate. | 1. Explore mechanisms for virtual Pre-ETS.
2. Explore ways to increase service provision using current resources.
3. Explore local and regional mobility management resources to address transportation barriers.
 |
| **4** | ***Increase Community-Based Pre-ETS***Youth-identified barriers to employment include limited job experience, lack of opportunities to explore careers, poor job market, and a lack of opportunities. Pre-ETS can reduce these barriers. One of the greatest predictors of employment after high school for those with disabilities is employment experience during high school. MCB and partners should increase work-based learning experiences with an emphasis on experiences outside of the traditional school setting and MCB should work with Pre-ETS providers to increase the number of students served. Finally, MCB should consider additional, non-traditional partnerships to increase student access to community-based Pre-ETS. | 1. Work with Pre-ETS providers to increase each student’s use and access to work-based learning and other community-based Pre-ETS.
2. Educate TVI instructors on recent rule changes that expands eligibility of students.
3. Evaluate opportunities to increase the number of students participating with current Pre-ETS providers in community-based Pre-ETS.
4. Evaluate additional partnerships that could increase student access to community-based Pre-ETS.
 |

Throughout this report you will find that MCB has taken great efforts to adopt successful practices, build strong relationships, and use research and data to form a vision forward. These recommendations and calls to action build upon MCB’s groundwork. Implementing these changes to close gaps and improve service delivery can help MCB continue their forward trajectory toward innovative practices, data-based decision making, and quality outcomes for job seekers across Massachusetts who are blind and visually impaired.

# Introduction

This section provides background and context for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, as well as the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind’s vocational rehabilitation program.

## Acronyms and Glossary

The following terms are used throughout this document. The full meaning of each of these commonly used acronyms is provided here for ease of reference to readers.

| **Acronym** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| ACA | Affordable Care Act |
| AWARE | Accessible Web-Based Activity and Reporting Environment |
| ACS | American Consumer Survey |
| AIM | Accessible Instruction Manual |
| BrLAC | Braille Literary Advisory Council |
| CAP | Client Assistance Program |
| CIES | Competitive Integrated Employment Services |
| CMR | Code of Massachusetts Regulations |
| CSNA | Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment |
| DBES | Deaf Blind Extended Supports |
| DCF | Department of Children and Families |
| DDS | Department of Developmental Services |
| DESE | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| DMH | Department of Mental Health |
| DPH | Department of Public Health |
| ELL | English Language Learner |
| EOHHS | Executive Office of Health and Human Services |
| EOLWD | Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development |
| IDEA | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act |
| IEP | Individualized Education Plan |
| IPE | Individualized Plan for Employment |
| MAB | Massachusetts Association for the Blind |
| MCB | Massachusetts Commission for the Blind |
| MCDHH | Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing |
| MRC | Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission |
| M&O | Mobility and Orientation |
| PBP | Perkins Business Partnership |
| PCG | Public Consulting Group, Inc. |
| Pre-ETS | Pre-Employment Transition Services |
| PYD | Partners for Youth with Disabilities |
| RC | Rehabilitation Commission |
| RSA | Rehabilitation Services Administration |
| SNAP | Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program |
| SOC | Standard Occupational Classification |
| SSI | Supplemental Security Income |
| SRA | State Rehabilitation Council |
| TVI | Teacher of the Visually Impaired |
| VR | Vocational Rehabilitation |
| WIOA | Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act |

## Purpose

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is a report that is required by the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) every three years. This Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) CSNA assesses the needs of individuals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who are blind or visually impaired in their pursuit of competitive employment. The CSNA seeks to effectively assess MCB consumer needs in order to advise MCB future policy and decision making so MCB can best serve their consumers and meet their rehabilitation needs.

The CSNA is designed to satisfy requirements in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and produce useful and timely information. The requirements must meet §361.29 Section 101(a)(15) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. This includes assessment must include the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of--

* 1. individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
	2. individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program carried out under this title; and
	3. individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system (other than the vocational rehabilitation program), as identified by such individuals and personnel assisting such individuals through the components; and
	4. youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services;

The CSNA must also include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and preemployment transition services, and the extent to which such services provided under this Act are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.) in order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Finally, the CSNA must include an assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

## Background

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) was established under Section 129 of Chapter 6 of the Massachusetts General Laws. MCB is the point of entry for vocational and social rehabilitation services for residents of the Commonwealth who are declared to be legally blind by an eye professional. In addition, people who have low vision and have been diagnosed with progressive visual impairments leading to legal blindness are eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. MCB partners with local agencies, healthcare providers, employers, and clients’ relatives to provide services, including rehabilitation and social services and vocational assistance. These services help individuals to work toward independence and full community participation.

MCB has contracted with Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to assist with several related Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) research initiatives, including the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and other VR studies and needs assessments for a total of seven scopes of work. These scopes of work are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table : PCG VR Research Initiatives 2020 Scopes of Work

| **Scope Number** | **Scope Name** | **Scope Description** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Scope 1 | Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) | Gathering and analyzing primary and secondary data to analyze vocational rehabilitation services offered by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. The final report will meet RSA requirements for completion of the CSNA. |
| Scope 2 | Study of VR Closures | Research and analysis on VR closures over the last five years, including successful and not successful outcomes. |
| Scope 3 | VR Needs Assessment | Assessment and analysis of VR consumers and their specific needs. |
| Scope 4 | Pre-ETS Needs Assessment | In-depth assessment and analysis of the needs of Pre-ETS consumers. |
| Scope 5 | Study of Tax Tables and Tax Publications as they Relate to VR Consumers | Research and analysis of local and national tax tables and deductions as it relates to blind consumers. |
| Scope 6 | Feasibility of Apprenticeships in Emerging Industries for Blind VR Consumers | Assessment of the feasibility of apprenticeships for legally blind VR consumers in emerging industries. |
| Scope 7 | Feasibility of Blind Business Enterprise on eBay or Amazon | Research on the feasibility, and accessibility, of blind business enterprises on internet-based businesses. |

PCG gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to complete the 2020 CSNA. PCG incorporated information from the completed scopes 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 reports in this final CSNA (scope 1) report. PCG used the analysis and results from these reports to inform, expand and meet the overall goals of the CSNA. These findings are summarized in the following sections.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Closure Findings Report

MCB and PCG partnered to understand the factors leading to successful case closures. A successful case closure is a case closed with employment in an integrated setting. This involved exploring cases that closed to determine what factors and characteristics of clients served, and the services they received, were most likely to lead to successful outcomes.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Closure Findings Report complimented and built upon work that was completed by PCG earlier this year in an interim report titled Vocational Rehabilitation Closures Compiled Analysis Report, dated May 29, 2020. This interim 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 were the strongest predictors of successful case closures according to case management data.

The Compiled Analysis Report described several findings that merited further investigation. Due to data limitations, PCG was able to pursue some but not all of these findings. As a work around, PCG explored other avenues of information to determine more details about which 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, and other qualitative data – to paint a more detailed picture of successful case closures beyond the findings of the Compiled Analysis Report.

Highlights from findings included:

* 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. Less than half of MCB consumers agreed they could access MCB offices using public transportation. 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.
* 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, who are long term unemployed or have low incomes are least likely to have successful case closures. Finally, individuals who are eligible for services through an eligibility determination of significant disability are less likely to have a successful case closure than individuals identified as having a most significant disability.
* 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.
* Focus group participants noted that **Mobility and Orientation skills** were 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” were also seen as vital to achieving successful, integrated employment outcomes.
* On average, consumers with closed cases were 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.
* Those who work with younger VR participants frequently emphasized **parental involvement** and coordination as important success factors. Specifically, stakeholders noted how important it was for parents to help 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, including independence and self-advocacy skills.

We found that cases with primary support of personal income were much more likely to close successfully and acknowledged MCB’s priority of increasing consumer participation in the labor force. We crafted our findings into both interim and longer-term recommendations and action steps focused on increasing employment among MCB consumers of all ages.

We grouped our recommendations into the following categories:

1. **Increase access to transportation services**
	1. Explore ways to develop innovative transportation solutions.
	2. Determine how to coordinate innovative transportation solutions with other state agencies.
	3. Work with community partners to develop alternative approaches to accessing transportation.
	4. Consider alternative approaches to subsidizing transportation.
	5. Review M&O services to ensure they are meeting the needs of consumers.
2. **Improve mobility and orientation services**
	1. Conduct thorough review and evaluation of current suite of MCB M&O services.
	2. Evaluate physical MCB office locations and the layout of these offices to improve access.
3. **Prepare for a technology first future**
	1. Conduct detailed evaluation of how technology may impact services and opportunities for the agency and job seekers.
	2. Train staff on the availability and operation of remote access technologies.
	3. Expand access to and support the use of these remote access technology tools.
	4. Expand virtual service delivery on an ongoing basis.
4. **Identify and address barriers to completing educational milestones**
	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.
5. **Evaluate case status and services for MCB Youth**
	1. Implement recommendations outlined in PCG’s Feasibility of Apprenticeships in Emerging Industries for Blind VR Consumers report.
	2. Implement recommendations outlined in PCG’s Pre-ETS Needs Assessment report.
	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.
	4. Increase parental involvement and coordination.
	5. Help younger individuals build the personal and emotional skills necessary for development.

Our recommendations highlighted areas for further research and examination that complemented MCB’s already considerable investment in staff, advocacy, resources and knowledge. We outlined 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.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment

MCB partnered with PCG to conduct an in-depth needs assessment of consumers who use its Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The goal of the assessment was to understand the current state of VR services in Massachusetts, identify any gaps in service and put forth a series of recommendations that recognized strengths and addressed areas for improvement. MCB seeks to expand and enhance the Vocational Rehabilitation program to include more eligible consumers. In relation to their effort to serve more eligible consumers, MCB wishes to encourage the transition to employment (not just a job, but a *career*) while decreasing the reliance on benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Ultimately, MCB wishes to communicate to this population that work is connected to independence and community engagement.

According to MCB, VR consumers are people who have a disability of legal blindness which, for that person,

* constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment;
* the person requires VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment;
* and there is a determination that the person can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from VR services[[1]](#footnote-2).

In short, VR services scaffold skills and pathways to lasting, meaningful employment for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

We used MCB VR case management and American Consumer Survey (ACS) data to determine VR demographics – including race and ethnicity and severity of disability – to assess the current state of services provided. A robust stakeholder engagement strategy included deployment of consumer and business surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews. These targeted population outreach efforts provided us with the qualitative data to understand VR consumers’ perceptions and feelings regarding quality of service delivery and their experience working with MCB. It also helped us identify several barriers to accessing VR services.

The report outlined how MCB provides quality VR services, with positive feedback from the majority of consumers. VR program strengths included:

* **Positive consumer experience** – overall, *individuals with open VR cases reported a positive consumer experience.* The majority of survey respondents reported that MCB counselors respected their culture, background and identity; their counselor responded in a timely way to their questions, concerns, or needs; their counselor explained why they were eligible or not eligible for VR services; they received services in a place that was convenient for them; MCB provided them with the technology or equipment they needed to receive services; and that MCB provided the accommodations they needed to receive services.
* **Well-coordinated partnerships** – survey results indicate that there is a high degree of service coordination between MCB and its partners, such as Carrol Center for the Blind. MCB’s partner coordination was rated a 3.4 or “good”. Additionally, MCB providers spoke about their partnerships with MCB in very positive terms and were happy to be MCB vendors.

The report identified several areas for expansion and growth. VR services barriers include:

* **Transportation** – All data collection methods and stakeholder outreach determined that transportation is the most significant barrier to receiving services as well as to obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
* **Minority VR Consumer Satisfaction** – Overall, VR consumers were pleased with their VR counselor and the services they received. However, members of a minority group were less likely to report positive experiences in a variety of counselor interactions. They also reported inadequate access to testing or assessments.
* **Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities** – Over half of survey respondents indicate that employer attitudes toward people with disabilities is a significant barrier to obtaining employment. Focus group participants and stakeholder interviews validated this finding.

In response to the findings identified within the VR Needs Assessment Report, PCG developed recommendations and action steps so MCB could address the needs of VR consumers:

1. **Expand access for rural consumers**
	1. Learn more about perceptions and potential gaps in services for individuals living in rural areas.
	2. Explore how technology can increase access of services and employment for individuals living in rural areas.
2. **Increase access and reduce barriers to transportation**
	1. Work with public and private entities to identify mutually beneficial relationships that increase transportation opportunities that align with the labor market.
	2. Train counselors, contractors, and consumers on how to talk with potential employers about leveraging technology to increase their applicant pool and meet their labor needs.
3. **Identify barriers to minority service and counselor relationships**
	1. Identify gaps in staff knowledge related to cultural responsivity, and responsive and inclusive service delivery.
	2. Identify successful practices / staff who deliver these culturally-responsive practices.
	3. Develop a strategic training plan addressing identified knowledge gaps and leveraging staff strengths.
4. **Improve MCB data practices**
	1. Evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine if there are ways to increase accuracy and consistency of service data that can be used to make decisions.
	2. Explore the feasibility and opportunities to enhance access of data and reporting to facilitate data-based decision making, with a focus on capturing, maintaining, and using data around service delivery.

MCB service delivery was generally perceived as positive. However, there is room to increase access to and improve services through reduction of barriers, enhancement of relationships, and increased availability of services. Consumers in rural areas would benefit from an enhanced job market and increased use of technology.

### Pre-ETS Needs Assessment

MCB partnered with PCG to conduct an in-depth needs assessment of its Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) consumers. The goal of the assessment was to understand the current state of Pre-ETS in Massachusetts, identify any gaps in service and put forth a series of recommendations that recognized strengths and addressed areas for improvement.

MCB is the state’s lead agency responsible for providing Pre-ETS to visually impaired students aged 14 – 21 in Massachusetts. For many years, Pre-ETS have been provided to eligible students in a school or provider-based setting. MCB has done an admirable job ensuring these students receive the services they need. According to MCB[[2]](#footnote-3), Pre-ETS are much more limited compared to the range of VR services available to students who have applied for and been found eligible for VR services. Pre-ETS programs may provide the following services:

1. Job exploration counseling;
2. Work-based learning experiences, including in-school or after school opportunities or those experienced outside the traditional school setting;
3. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary educational programs;
4. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and
5. Instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring.

We used MCB Pre-ETS case data to determine Pre-ETS demographics – including race and ethnicity and severity of disability – to assess the current state of services provided. A robust stakeholder engagement strategy included deployment of consumer and business surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews. These targeted population outreach efforts provided us with the qualitative data to understand Pre-ETS consumers’ perceptions and feelings regarding quality of service delivery and their experience working with MCB. It also helped us identify several barriers to accessing Pre-ETS.

The report outlined how MCB provides quality Pre-ETS in a way that is relevant to students and suggested opportunities for improvement. Pre-ETS program strengths included:

* **Positive relationships with career counselors** – The consumer survey found that the overwhelming majority of Pre-ETS students agreed that their counselor respected their culture, background, and identity, with no individuals disagreeing with that statement.
* **Well-coordinated partnerships** – Survey results indicated that there is a high degree of coordination of services between MCB and its partners, such as Carroll Center for the Blind.
* **Eagerness to learn new skills** - Focus group participants communicated a unanimous preference for post-secondary training in specialized fields such as science or music to further career opportunities.

The report identified several areas for expansion and growth. Pre-ETS barriers include:

* **Transportation** – All data collection methods and stakeholder outreach determined that transportation is the most significant barrier to receiving Pre-ETS and to obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
* **Perceived ability for individuals with multiple disabilities to participate in employment-related opportunities** – The Teachers for Students who are Visually Impaired (TVI) focus group participants noted that individuals with multiple disabilities were less likely to enter the job market and would most likely participate in community programming post-graduation.

In response to the findings identified within the Pre-ETS Needs Assessment Report, PCG developed recommendations and action steps so MCB could address the needs of Pre-ETS consumers:

1. **Examine and leverage strengths**
	1. Identify and operationalize successful practices in coordination and culturally competent and person-centered service delivery.
2. **Leverage technology and transportation resources to increase access and overcome barriers**
	1. Explore mechanisms for virtual Pre-ETS.
	2. Explore ways to increase service provision using current resources.
	3. Explore local and regional mobility management resources to address transportation barriers.
3. **Increase community-based Pre-ETS**
	1. Work with Pre-ETS providers to increase each student’s use and access to work-based learning and other community-based Pre-ETS.
	2. Educate TVI instructors on recent rule changes that expands eligibility of students.
	3. Evaluate opportunities to increase the number of students participating with current Pre-ETS providers in community-based Pre-ETS.
	4. Evaluate additional partnerships that could increase student access to community-based Pre-ETS.

MCB service delivery was generally perceived as positive. However, MCB can increase access to and improve Pre-ETS through reduction of barriers and the use of technology. MCB can increase support for students receiving enhanced Pre-ETS in the community by helping them to obtain personal employment experience and build relationships that will lead to success after graduation.

## Coordination with Partners and Stakeholders

This section highlights MCB’s current coordination with existing partners and stakeholders in the Commonwealth and beyond, including educational entities such as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), workforce development partners, and other partners that MCB regularly interacts with in both the public and private domains.

### Educational Entities

This section highlights MCB’s coordination with different education entities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, including coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), interagency agreements between MCB and state education entities, and identification and outreach procedures for students with disabilities who need transition services.

#### Coordination with Education Services

MCB coordinates with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to VR services. Coordination and activities are outlined in an agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). MCB finalized an agreement with DESE several years ago that describes the roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services. MCB’s plans, policies, and procedures for coordinating with DESE to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities include:

* MCB and DESE outreach to and identify students with visual impairments in need of transition and pre-employment transition services. Student outreach occurs as early as possible during the transition planning process and includes information about the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and the scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.
* The continued consultation and technical assistance to the education agency related to the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation services.
* The continued transition planning by MCB and education personnel that facilitates the development and completion of students’ individual education programs through the Chapter 688 process. Chapter 688, a state law passed in 1984, mandates that the Executive Office of Health and Human Services establish a Bureau of Transition Planning to assure the provision of adequate transitional planning services to individuals with disabilities completing special education.

MCB and DESE’s agreement has resulted in a strong working relationship to share information and coordinate services and resources to support positive outcomes for students with visual impairments. Also supporting ongoing collaboration, a DESE representative attends MCB’s quarterly Rehab Council meetings. These meetings may occur more frequently when the agencies are collaborating on a project or agreement. DESE and MCB also discuss contracts and options for funding certain projects.

In another extension of partnership, MCB has taken a strong lead on the Braille Literacy Advisory Council (BrLAC). The Council was established by [state law](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/laws-regs/mcb/mass-braille-bill.html) in 1996. The council works in partnership with MCB and DESE. The council consists of nine members including those with experience and expertise in using computer technology for the production of Braille, educators of students with visual impairments, parents of a blind child, blind persons who are regular and effective users of Braille, and representatives of advocacy organizations of blind persons. The council provides recommendations on topics such as Braille instruction, literacy assessment for students with visual impairments, teacher certification and recertification, MCAS testing, and availability of instructional materials and Braille production activities.

DESE recognizes MCB’s dedication to advocating for the needs of the individuals they serve. DESE looks forward to continuing their partnership with MCB to improve services for students with more intensive needs, such as those that are more medically, physically or behaviorally challenged, as these students are less likely to be on a track to receive VR experiences. To better serve this group, DESE envisions collaborating with MCB to build relationships with families by helping them establish goals for their child, connecting them to advocates for their child and school, and helping them understand the special education process. DESE would also like to see MCB continue building relationships with the schools so MCB obtains all the services their consumers need. Interagency Agreement with State Educational Agency

**Consultation and Technical Assistance**

MCB and DESE’s agreement includes financial responsibilities of each agency, including provisions for determining state lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services. As requested, MCB provides information to school districts. It also provides for regular communication and information sharing on topics of mutual interest such as agency policy initiatives; resources; transition activities, including pre-employment transition services; the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks; and the Expanded Core Curriculum for legally-blind students. MCB also coordinates with DESE for the delivery of the Accessible Instruction Materials (AIM) Library.

**Transition Planning for Individualized Education Programs**

In conjunction with education personnel, MCB conducts formal transition planning that facilitates the development and completion of students’ individualized education programs. As the federally designated VR agency for blind individuals, MCB participates in eligible students’ IEP teams. DESE and MCB compliance with state and federal student and client record confidentiality laws, DESE special education law and policy guidance, and compliance monitoring for school districts.

MCB falls within the purview of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Bureau of Transitional Planning in EOHHS monitors an inter-agency cooperative planning process that outlines agency responsibilities and requires the participation of all relevant human services agencies. An individual transition plan must be developed by the agencies at least six months before the termination of special education services. This plan, which outlines the services to be provided and identifies the agency responsible for the provision of each service, must be approved by an inter-agency Transitional Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Human Services, and the consumer or his or her guardian. This process assures that an IPE is developed and approved for each student determined to be eligible for VR services before the student leaves the school setting. This process makes it much easier to arrange necessary support services to enable consumers to participate in VR services.

#### Identification and Outreach Procedures for Students with Disabilities Who Need Transition Services

MCB and educational personnel conduct transition planning identification and outreach to facilitate the development and completion of students’ individualized education programs through the Chapter 688 process.

MCB provides children’s services to legally-blind children under its state social services funding. Children participating in these services are referred by their social workers to VR counselors when they are age 14. Referrals from this program are a major component of outreach for the provision of pre-employment transition services, transition services, and other vocational rehabilitation services.

All legally blind children and adults in Massachusetts are identified and registered with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind as a consequence of the state’s mandatory reporting law. MCB regularly reaches out to all registrants between the ages of 14 and 22 to acquaint them with the agency and its services and to offer pre-employment transition services, transition services, and other vocational rehabilitation services.

MCB, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs (the state Parent Training and Information Center), has developed an information packet for the parents of children with visual impairments on the pre-employment transition services and transition services offered by the MCB vocational rehabilitation program.

### Workforce Development

MassHire is the Massachusetts statewide workforce system that falls under the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) and includes local workforce development boards and American Job Centers (Career Centers). It is overseen by the MassHire State Workforce Board (oversees the local workforce development boards) and MassHire Department of Career Services (oversees the MassHire Career Centers). MassHire is the backbone of the state’s workforce delivery system for employment and training services for job seekers, businesses and workers.

According to the State Plan, MCB refers all VR consumers to MassHire Career Centers. Over the years, MCB has offered to place staff onsite at the centers, provide staff training on blindness and accessibility, and consult with career centers on the accessibility of materials and software.

In 2017, MCB and other WIOA partners entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with MassHire Career Centers. Under the MOU, access to MCB programs, services, and resources will be made available at all MassHire Centers. Local areas determine how MCB programs and services are accessed through the MassHire Centers based on the volume of customers and the availability of MCB staff.

The MOU specifies that legally blind and visually impaired consumers receive access to MCB services at the MassHire Career Centers in one or more of the following ways:

* MassHire staff will be trained to provide information to legally blind and visually impaired consumers about programs, services, and activities available through MCB.
* MassHire Career Center staff make a direct link between the legally blind and visually impaired consumer and MCB staff to schedule an appointment, or to receive useful information about programs and services.
* Based on need, MCB staff are physically present at the MassHire Career Centers to provide services.

In addition, the MOU specifies that MCB supports an integrated service delivery strategy in which MassHire Career Center staff provide Career Center services to legally blind and visually impaired customers in the following ways:

* Help the Local Boards train MassHire Career Center staff to use assistive technology to support visually impaired or legally blind consumers who seek Center services.
* Provide training to MassHire Career Center staff on accessibility requirements for legally blind and visually impaired consumers.
* Assist with workshop accommodations for legally blind and visually impaired consumers.
* Provide training to MassHire Career Center staff so that staff have basic knowledge of programs, services, and resources available through MCB.
* Ensure that MCB Employment Services Representatives and MassHire Career Center Business Service Representatives collaborate so that legally blind and visually impaired consumers receive appropriate job matching.
* Provide sensitivity training to MassHire Career Center staff.

MCB believes that these strategies will significantly improve consumer access and use of career center services.

The coordination between MCB and MassHire is further outlined in the MCB 2020-2023 Draft State Plan. MCB outlines relevant strategies for helping the statewide workforce development system assist individuals who are legally blind through the following activities:

* Provide all MassHire Career Centers with an evaluation of their accessibility to visually-impaired consumers;
* Provide onsite VR services to legally blind consumers who have scheduled appointments at MassHire Career Centers;
* Provide blindness and visual impairment training to workforce development agencies;
* Provide consultation to workforce development staff;
* Collaborate with workforce development agencies to develop apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities for legally blind consumers;
* Identify job-driven training opportunities for legally blind consumers; and
* Develop an improved referral process among the partner agencies.

Since apprenticeships have seldom been accessed by legally blind consumers, MCB continues to research information available through the Massachusetts Division of Apprenticeship Standards, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, and other vocational rehabilitation agencies to learn more about apprenticeships accessible to legally blind persons and how to access opportunities through the Massachusetts Apprenticeship Initiative (MAI) or other resources in Massachusetts and New England.

### Initiatives with Other Partners

This section explores MCB’s existing partnerships with public and private businesses.

#### Interagency Cooperation

MCB cooperates with other Massachusetts state agencies responsible for administering the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment.

**MassHealth (Medicaid)**

MCB has a good relationship with MassHealth, the program that provides Massachusetts Medicaid services. Approximately 33% of individuals registered as legally blind in Massachusetts benefit from the program. MassHealth services have key comparable benefits empower many VR consumers to reach their vocational goals. MCB’s state-funded Deaf Blind Extended Supports (DBES) program also works closely with MassHealth to provide services under the Home and Community-Based waiver. This extra support is critical to successful outcomes in some cases.

**Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS)**

MCB maintains units of VR counselors who provide specialized services to people who are deaf-blind or who have an intellectual disability and are also blind. These units work closely with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to facilitate the development and completion of plans and services for persons with intellectual disabilities who may need DDS and VR services. Specialized counselors also work closely with the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and staff from the Helen Keller National Center to provide coordinated services to deaf-blind persons.

In 2015, MCB and DDS executed a Memorandum of Agreement including provisions for use of joint agency resources to ensure quality service delivery and long-term supports resulting in competitive, integrated employment outcomes. This includes MCB funding for appropriate VR and supported employment services, and a DDS commitment to fund long-term, ongoing employment support services when needed.

In 2016, MCB and DDS matched data to identify all consumers who are potentially dually eligible, identifying approximately 1,800 consumers. Upon further review, DDS estimated that 400 of these consumers might be appropriate candidates to receive VR services.

**Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH)**

MCB and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) have worked cooperatively to provide extended and other services to certain legally blind persons that have received supported employment and other services from MCB.

#### Cooperation with Private Non-Profit Organizations

In accordance with the procedures of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, MCB has contracts for purchase of services with all private, non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers. Contracts include statewide rates and technical specifications for the most commonly purchased services, including vocational evaluation, supported employment, on-site job coaching and job development. These contracts are subject to competitive bidding; solicitations are posted on the Commonwealth’s COMMBUYS website. As required by the Rehabilitation Act, one member of the State Rehabilitation Council represents a non-profit provider. In addition, several other members happen to work for non-profit providers.

To leverage its resources, MCB has recently developed enhanced public-private collaborations with the Commonwealth’s significant non-profit service providers for the blind. Organizations include Perkins, the Carroll Center, and Massachusetts Association for the Blind (MAB) Community Services. For example, in the fall of 2018 MCB convened a statewide meeting for both MCB and partner agencies’ leadership teams to build closer relationships and discuss common concerns and possible mutual initiatives. MCB has also collaborated with the Perkins Business Partnership (PBP), an initiative helping MCB job-ready consumers optimize their resumes and to obtain job interviews. Perkins Business Partnership meetings involve MCB job-ready candidates breaking into small groups with PBP members to review resumes, evaluate and brainstorm job search strategies and identify mentors.

MCB is exploring other ways to increase collaboration and regular communication with all of the Massachusetts non-profit agencies that serve blind consumers to improve the provision of services to persons who are legally blind.

#### Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

MCB has entered into partnerships and cooperative agreements with other state agencies and entities, where appropriate, to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals and youth with the most significant disabilities.

As a member of the Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) service delivery system along with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), DDS and the Massachusetts Commission of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH), MCB’s supported employment consumers are able to access a system of supports in a streamlined fashion that is outcome driven and incorporates collaboration and consumer choice. Through this effort the disability agencies have a consistent pay scale, defined outcomes and can easily cost share the support services for people with disabilities.

MCB has contracted with an increasing number of new providers of community-based supported employment services. Results have varied but MCB has had positive experience with certain consumers who have needed very intensive supported employment services.

MCB, DDS and DMH have collaborated to provide extended services to a number of legally blind persons receiving MCB supported employment services. In 2015 MCB and DDS executed a new Memorandum of Agreement that includes provisions for the use of joint agency resources to ensure quality service delivery and long term supports for supported employment. The agreement provides for staff cross-training and includes formal funding commitments by MCB (for appropriate supported employment services) and DDS (for long-term, ongoing employment support services when needed).

In accordance with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act, MCB executed a WIOA Cooperative Agreement with MassHealth in January 2016. In addition, MRC has clarified that MCB consumers who have been rehabilitated into competitive integrated supported employment will be eligible to receive funding for ongoing supports under its state-funded Extended Ongoing Supports Program. MCB expects that the availability of this resource will increase the opportunities for supported employment for legally blind consumers who have significant secondary disabilities but do not qualify for on-going supports from another state or private agency.

#### Cooperative Agreements with Agencies not Carrying out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System

MCB cooperates with and uses the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system as described below.

**Federal, state and local agencies and programs**

MCB cooperates with other agencies under the purview of EOHHS, including: DMH, DDS, Department of Public Health (DPH), Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), the Department of Youth Services (DYS), Department of Elder Affairs, MassHealth, MCDHH, MRC, Office for Refugees and Immigrants, Department of Veterans’ Services, Chelsea Soldiers’ Home and Holyoke Soldiers’ Home. Agency heads meet every two weeks to discuss issues of mutual concern and to resolve inter-agency problems. Other agency staffs meet collaboratively to work on numerous projects.

MCB’s VR counselors work closely with DDS to develop and complete plans and services for persons who are deaf-blind and persons who have an intellectual disability and are blind who may need their services in addition to VR services. Specialized counselors also work very closely with MCDHH and staff of the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults to provide coordinated services to deaf-blind persons.

**State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998**

MCB has relationships with programs funded under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act and administered through MRC, including MassMatch which provides comprehensive information about assistive technology availability and funding. MCB also has a relationship with the Assistive Technology Program which provides assistive technology assessments, buys and equipment set-up, training and follow-up. Massachusetts Easter Seals, United Cerebral Palsy of Berkshire County and the University of MA-Dartmouth Center for Rehabilitation Engineering provide services on a regional basis and have onsite assistive technology devices for evaluation and training. The Massachusetts Assistive Technology Loan Program, operated by Easter Seals Massachusetts, gives people with disabilities and their families access to low-interest cash loans so they can buy the assistive technology devices they need.

**Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the USDA**

When appropriate, MCB works with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development programs such as the Small Business Resource at Cornell University to develop consumer vocational opportunities. MCB makes frequent referrals to the USDA’s Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) administered by DTA. MCB has also participated in DTA’s special outreach initiatives.

**Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth**

Massachusetts has a number of programs for out-of-school youth that MCB works with to provide services for individual consumers. During the past year, MCB has been working closely with the Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD), a non-profit agency that empowers youth with disabilities to reach their full potential by providing transformative mentoring programs, youth development opportunities, and inclusion expertise. MCB offers all transition-age students and out-of-school youth mentoring through the Partners for Youth with Disabilities Mentor Match program. The Mentor Match pairs youth and young adults with disabilities with adult mentors who best fit their personality, interests, and skills. MCB also has begun offering transition-age students and out-of-school youth online mentoring through Project L.E.N.S.

**State use contracting programs**

In 2015, the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Program was expanded to include Veteran Business Enterprises, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Business Enterprises, and Disability-Owned Business Enterprises. Some MCB consumers have taken advantage of this program to increase their business and vocational opportunities.

## Landscape of Services

This section describes events and activities that have impacted, and may continue to impact, MCB service delivery over the past three years. It highlights the conditions (landscape) under which MCB has operated for the last several years.

### Individuals with Visual Impairments

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is the State’s leading agency for providing a vast spectrum of programs and services for individuals who are blind and those with visual impairments. According to the WIOA state plan, there are approximately 26,000 potentially eligible legally blind persons in Massachusetts. However, not all the potentially eligible people receive MCB services.

MCB offers three programs – social rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation, and deaf-blind extended supports – each of which receive approximately one third of the funding:

* Social Rehabilitation – Anyone not pursing a VR outcome, under age 14 and over age 65. Approximately 16,000 individuals are eligible to be served with an average age of 82.
* Vocational Rehabilitation – Approximately 8,000 to 9,000 consumers are eligible to be served. These are working age consumers.
* Deaf Blind Extended Supports – Approximately 1,000 MCB consumers are eligible to be served who are blind and have other significant secondary disabilities such as deafness or developmental disabilities.

The goal of MCB’s vocational rehabilitation (VR) program is to provide MCB consumers with the skills and opportunities to gain and maintain successful, competitive, integrated employment. According to the state plan, in October 2017, MCB established a new eligible category for individuals with low vision with a progressive visual impairment (including dual sensory loss) and a diagnosis leading to legal blindness. As such, MCB provides all VR services to individuals who qualify for services under the low vision category in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as most recently amended. In FY20, the VR program served approximately 1,300 individuals.

MCB’s performance on RSA standards and indicators over previous years has at all times met the minimum level of overall performance established by RSA. Some agency-specific results for FFY 2019 are:

* + - 57.6% of MCB consumers exited with employment
		- Average hourly earnings for competitive employment outcomes for MCB was $22.86
		- Average number of hours worked per week for competitive employment outcomes was 31.16 hours
		- Cost per participant served in Career Services was $159.84
		- Cost per participant served in Training Services was $4,206.05
		- Ratio of Minority Service Rate to Non-Minority Service Rate was .911

### Employment Demand in Massachusetts

Healthcare and Information Technology (IT/Tech) represent a large portion of the Massachusetts economy and employment. Both industries are expected to grow long-term. Table 2 shows these industries encompass a wide range of occupations and skill levels.

Table : Long-Term Industry Employment Projections 2018-2028

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Industry Title** | **Employment 2018** | **Employment 2028** | **Change Level** | **Change Percent** |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 638,481 | 673,228 | 34,747 | 5.44% |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services | 327,628 | 357,859 | 30,231 | 9.23% |
| Hospitals | 203,234 | 216,927 | 13,693 | 6.74% |
| Ambulatory Health Care Services | 190,542 | 201,908 | 11,366 | 5.97% |
| Nursing and Residential Care Facilities | 105,823 | 111,590 | 5,767 | 5.45% |
| Social Assistance | 138,882 | 142,803 | 3,921 | 2.82% |

(Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 2020)

*The tech sector continues to be a strong driver of the Massachusetts economy. When considering tech sector jobs, tech occupation jobs, and the indirect and induced jobs that support them, tech in Massachusetts underpins 35% of all jobs in the Commonwealth, 37% of the gross state product (GSP), and 46% of payroll, contributing 17% of the revenue that makes up the state’s overall budget.*

 *– MassTLC State of the Massachusetts Tech Economy, 2019*

Table 3 below reflects MCB VR closure data on exiting cases from 2017 to 2019. It lists the most common occupation categories (Standard Occupational Classification Codes) MCB VR participants entered immediately after MCB services. The data contained in the ‘Projected Employment % Change 2018 to 2028’ column come from the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance Long-term Occupation Projections Industry-Occupation Employment Projection Matrix for 2018-2028. These 10-year forecasts are updated every other year and include adjustments reflecting the significant economic impact from COVID-19.

Table : Most Common Job Titles of MCB VR Exiting Cases, SOC Codes (2020)

| SOC Code | Title | Number of Placements | Projected Employment % Change 2018 to 2028[[3]](#footnote-4) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 434051 | Customer Service Representatives | 21 | -5.15% |
| 253099 | Teachers, All Other[[4]](#footnote-5) | 14 | 6.73% |
| 412031 | Retail Salespersons | 13 | 0.60% |
| 211029 | Social Workers, All Other | 10 | 7.08% |
| 439199 | Office and Administrative Support Workers, All Other | 8 | 4.03% |

### Transportation

Transportation is historically and continually cited as one of the most significant barriers to MCB consumers accessing programs, services, and employment. Nonetheless, according to the VR 2020 – 2023 State Plan, “the MCB Rehabilitation Council (RC) has had a long-term interest in transportation accessibility and its impact on the ability of consumers to pursue vocational objectives. The director of MCB’s Mobility Unit attends a number of meetings on regional and statewide transportation issues to keep the agency informed on issues relevant to transportation accessibility. MCB and the RC are closely following new transportation options such as UBER and Lyft. A number of blind persons who are proficient with technology have benefitted from these services. While the MCB RC believes that lack of transportation is a major barrier to consumers’ ability to participate in VR services and to obtain employment, it has made no specific recommendations during the past year to the agency on this issue.”

MCB’s goals and priorities jointly developed with the Rehabilitation Council in 2019 and outlined in MCB’s VR 2020-2023 State Plan address transportation in two of its goals:

1. “To help legally blind persons, including students and potentially eligible students, to develop and increase the independence needed to be successful in competitive employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.”
2. “To help legally blind persons to increase their independence, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.”

To achieve these goals, MCB outlines transportation-related priorities in the state plan. They include:

* “Advocate for better access to and improvement of public transportation and paratransit systems in order to increase the employment outcomes of persons who are legally blind”
* “Advocate for better access to, and improvement of, public transportation and paratransit systems throughout the Commonwealth.”

MCB recognizes that a longstanding problem / factor impeding the achievement of the above goals and priorities includes a “public transportation systems and pedestrian safety issue which limit access to employment and some VR services.” However, MCB reports making progress on addressing the issue in 2016 and 2017:

* In 2016, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority piloted a program between the Ride (the Ride service provides paratransit, or supplemental transportation, to customers with disabilities), Uber, and Lyft. Those eligible for the RIDE became eligible to take part in the program where they could use a ride- hailing service any time at a lower cost. In 2017, a review showed that more than 10,000 rides covering 45,000 miles in 133 zip codes had been provided. In addition, the partnership resulted in a 20% cost reduction for the transportation agency. The service, concentrated in the eastern part of the state, has benefitted many MCB consumers.
* In 2017, a statewide mobility management initiative was started between EOHHS and MassDOT to develop an online MassHire searchable directory of public, private, and accessible transportation options in the state. This initiative should be of particular interest for consumers in the rural parts of the state that still lack reliable transportation. The MCB RC continues to support MCB’s efforts on this issue.

In addition to the efforts that MCB continues to make to improve transportation access, it also provides several transportation-related benefits for individuals who are legally blind. These benefits include:

* **MBTA Blind Access CharlieCard** – Customers who are blind/visually impaired are allowed to ride all MBTA services for free with a Blind Access CharlieCard.
* **The RIDE** - The RIDE paratransit service provides door-to door, shared-ride transportation to eligible people who cannot use fixed-route transit (bus, subway, trolley) all or some of the time because of a physical, cognitive, or mental disability.
* **Other Regional Transportation** - Regional Transportation Authorities (RTAs) offer public transportation discounts to individuals who have disabilities.  Additionally, RTAs offer paratransit (door to door) services for individuals who have disabilities as mandated under ADA law. Furthermore, many regional Councils on Aging have transportation services that are available for individuals with disabilities as well as seniors and elders.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 has triggered unprecedented disruptions in business formation, business sustainability, and workers. This may both be a barrier and an opportunity for MCB. Retail and hospitality industries, which employ many individuals with blindness and visual impairments, are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Likewise, many local and state governments continue to experience resource deficits and an unpredictable future. However, these shortfalls may precisely be the opportunity for MCB to evaluate more creative models for service delivery and consumer support.

MCB has already risen to many of the challenges presented by COVID-19. For example, in early Spring when the onslaught of COVID-19 necessitated a national and statewide closure of many state agencies providing essential services to Massachusetts’ most vulnerable citizens, MCB took the time to thoughtfully plan for service continuity to its consumer base in a different (i.e. virtual) way. This careful planning allowed for the Commission to continue to reach its consumers and continue to perform the research essential to plan for the future.

In addition to the actions MCB has already taken, MCB may wish to pursue further research on the unique impact COVID-19 is having on the economy, state governments, and MCB consumers. Some efforts MCB could undertake to identify service need and the method to reach its consumers include initiating a survey on the level of access and quality of service MCB consumers have experienced before and during COVID-19. Additionally, MCB could research what virtual platforms are best suited to reach consumers when in-person services are not possible. Finally, MCB could perform data analysis on outcomes such as successful employment, during the COVID-19 pandemic to determine how this data lines up with historical trends.

### MCB VR Updates

This section summarizes the extent to which the MCB VR program goals described in the previously approved VR services portion of the Combined State Plan for the most recently completed 2019 program year were achieved.

MCB and the Rehabilitation Council mutually agreed upon goals and the use of Title I funds for innovation and expansion activities. Goals, priorities and progress are summarized in the following pages.

Long-standing problems and factors that impede the achievement of these goals and priorities include:

* Public transportation systems and pedestrian safety issues which limit access to employment and some vocational rehabilitation services;
* Students’ access to accessible textbooks;
* Accessibility of documents and internet sites needed to obtain and retain employment;
* Employer attitudes toward blindness; and
* Inaccessible information systems used by many large employers.

MCB has addressed the factors impeding achievement of these goals and priorities:

* In 2016, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s piloted a program between the Ride (provides paratransit or supplemental transportation to disabled customers), Uber and Lyft. Eligible consumers could use a ride- hailing service any time at a lower cost. A 2017 review showed more than 10,000 rides covering 45,000 miles in 133 zip codes, resulting in a 20% cost reduction for the transportation agency.
* In 2017, a statewide mobility management initiative was started between EOHHS and MassDOT to develop an online MassHire searchable directory of public, private, and accessible transportation options in the state.
* In 2015, The Braille Literacy Advisory Council (BrLAC) was charged with developing a plan for implementing Unified English Braille (UEB) in Massachusetts to present to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In 2017, The Braille Literacy Advisory Council proposed a plan for transitioning to a full implementation of UEB to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with vision impairments in Massachusetts. The implementation was planned for school year 2016 through 2020.
* Over the past year the BrLAC has focused on encouraging the College Board to provide SAT and other tests in the Braille format most appropriate for each student. Commissioner D’Arcangelo signed off on a letter to the College Board requesting that it accommodate each student’s individual needs. The BrLAC has also been working on Braille Certification/testing of TVIs.

**Goal I: To have sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.**

Priorities:

* Monitor annually the budget and regularly advocate full funding of the VR program to ensure that in the years ahead the MCB can carry out its obligations to its many consumers.
* Monitor annually the allocation of funds for the Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program and the Supported Employment Program.

Progress summary:

* MCB had sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals during PY 2019 and PY 2020 (projected). The Massachusetts Legislature has continued to fund the agency’s VR program sufficient to match federal funds. The Rehabilitation Council expresses interest in advocating for increased vocational rehabilitation funding at the state level. For the SFY 2020, there is more than sufficient state match. The SFY 2020 state appropriation for the state funded Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Program is enough to cover the need for more residential services for those consumers who are turning age 22. MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2019, members rated the agency’s progress as Very Good (4.5 out of 5).

**Goal II: To develop more employment options for VR consumers, including supported employment, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.**

Priorities:

* Develop and implement plans to increase training opportunities for transition age consumers who are not going to college.
* Continue and refine the agency’s internship program for legally blind students who are attending college; explore ways to expand the program to include recent high school graduates who are not going to college with the result that the number of students participating increases each year.

Progress summary:

* Increasing training opportunities for transition-age consumers who are not going to college continues to be a major focus area.
* In 2015, MCB partnered with Massachusetts Eye and Ear and Cambridge Health Alliance on Project SEARCH, a successful national 9-month program for individuals with disabilities that provides internship experiences. MCB partnered with these entities again in 2019 to develop the Employment Now initiative, similar to Project SEARCH but locally managed by the agency and two non-profit providers. This initiative fast tracks VR consumers to employment by combining internships or work experiences with the support of an onsite job coach while conducting an active job search. Eight consumers participated during 2019 and six have achieved full-time employment. MCB is seeking to recruit additional partners in other industries.
* During the past five years, MCB has participated in several hiring events with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission that were sponsored by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). Federal contractors are required to set a hiring goal of having 7% of their employees drawn from qualified workers with disabilities. MCB and MRC continue to maintain dialogue with OFCCP and has participated in several of its in-service training programs.
* In 2017, with a technical assistance grant from RSA, the Job Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical assistance (JDVRTAC), MCB operationalized VisionWorks Consortium with the Carroll Center for the Blind and the Perkins School for the Blind. The Consortium pooled their employer contacts into a centralized database to track the business partner engagement to increase employment opportunities for job seekers who are visually impaired.
* For the past several years MCB has regularly conducted a four-hour course of soft skills training for prospective student interns and job-ready consumers. Different courses are held for job-ready consumers who do not need soft skills training (e.g. networking and using LinkedIn). MCB will enhance/expand this training by developing a series of intensive soft skills “boot camp” training video sessions in different formats for a webinar series and other social media platforms.
* Many employers use telephone interviews to screen applicants. For several years MCB has contracted with Phone Interview Pro, a company that provides consumers with a thirty-minute simulated interview with an experienced corporate evaluator. A detailed report identifies strengths and areas for improvement and consumers have the opportunity to practice what s/he learned in a second interview.
	+ MCB also provides a one-day Essential Skills Training for transition-age youth that covers soft skills and other career development skills.
	+ MCB’s summer internship helps college-age and nontraditional students who are legally blind acquire work experience. In 2019 the program reached its 16th year and involved 80 participants. Overall there have been approximately 1,000 internship opportunities with 400 private and public business partners.
	+ MCB is a founding member of the Perkins Business Partnership (PBP), an alliance between Perkins and some of the region’s best-known businesses and nonprofits that is working to break down barriers to employment and expand opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2019, members rated the agency’s progress as Good/Very Good (4 out of 5).

**Goal III: To help legally blind persons to increase their independence, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.**

**Priorities:**

* Advocate and educate consumers and public officials on pedestrian safety issues that impact pedestrians who are legally blind and issues regarding laws pertaining to the white cane and the use of service dogs.
* Advocate for better access to, and improvement of, public transportation and paratransit systems throughout the Commonwealth.
* Increase consumers’ access to adaptive equipment as measured by the number served each year by the agency’s Technology for the Blind Unit.
* Increase students’ access to accessible textbooks.
* Advocate for improved accessibility of federal and state government documents and internet sites.

**Progress summary:**

* In recent years, MCB has collaborated with the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) around White Cane Safety Law. The RMV included white cane and use of service dog flyers in two separate mailings and ran electronic billboard public service announcements (PSAs) on four major highways across the state. MCB also worked with a local Cable Access network to produce a television PSA that promotes white cane safety and the Massachusetts White Cane Law.
* MCB has increased consumers’ access to both adaptive equipment and accessible textbooks during PY 2018 and PY 2019. MCB’s Technology for the Blind Unit will serve approximately 1,200 VR consumers during FFY 2020.
* MCB continues to enhance the independence, educational and vocational potential of blind children by providing adaptive equipment and software on a limited basis to elementary and middle-school aged children under its state-funded social services program. MCB has revised its policies under the VR program (in line with RSA regulations and guidance) to provide more adaptive equipment and training to pre-employment transition consumers to allow them to access and improve their work readiness, VR, and independent living skills when they are not in school.
* MCB has been working with providers to develop new options for pre- employment transition services. The Carroll Center for the Blind, Polus Center, Lowell Association for the Blind, Perkins, and Our Space, Our Place have developed work readiness programs to address several needs.

MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2019, members rated the agency’s progress as Very Good (4.25 out of 5).

**Goal IV: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of vocational rehabilitation services delivery, as measured by the Rehabilitation Council’s annual evaluation of the agency’s progress toward the goal.**

Priorities:

* Annually review MCB performance on RSA standards and indicators, WIOA performance measurements, and other statistical measures of effectiveness. Recommend improvement actions when appropriate.
* Improve communication among all MCB VR staff, including VR counselors in MCB regional offices and the Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Unit to enhance services for those who would otherwise not receive necessary services.
* Improve communication among MCB staff (VR counselors, children’s service workers and social workers) to facilitate services to those who have reached their fourteenth birthday and identify on a case-by-case basis the most appropriate MCB department to meet these individuals’ needs.
* Improve and maintain ongoing communication between MCB VR counselors and all other state, federal, contracted and private agencies providing technology, vocational training and employment services to MCB consumers, including consumers who are both blind and disabled.

Progress summary:

* In 2017 MCB migrated to a new case management system, AWARE. MCB continues to work with the vendor to develop and improve statistical reports for management and the Rehabilitation Council, including those required for the new WIOA performance measurements and RSA-911 reporting requirements for PY 2020.
* MCB RC members annually review MCB’s performance on statistical measures of effectiveness and agency consumer satisfaction studies. MCB’s RSA standards and indicators performance has at all times met the minimum level of overall performance established by RSA.
* MCB has prioritized facilitation of services to consumers who have reached their fourteenth birthday via a comprehensive assessment form. MCB and DESE have jointly developed a technical advisory to educate TVIs, O&M instructors and other special education representatives on Pre-ETS eligibility requirements, including for those who are potentially eligible.
* Each year MCB holds several College Nights throughout the state for students and their families considering college. MCB also holds a Greater Boston half-day orientation session each spring for consumers who intend to begin college in the fall.
* To help adolescents turning 14 transition to adult services, VR Counselors and MCB Children’s Workers help adolescents and their families develop a roadmap for the child’s services going forward. MCB also offers consultation with rehabilitation teachers and mobility and technology specialists.
* MCB has committed in the statewide Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to participate in teams empowered to develop and execute local MOUs (modeled on the state MOU).

 MCB RC Evaluation: In FY 2019, members rated the agency’s progress as Good/Very Good (4 out of 5).

# Methodology

This section 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).

## Secondary Data Sources

PCG relied on publicly available data sources to make population level estimates and statements about the population of Massachusetts and the population of individuals with disabilities. The source of this secondary data is the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is the largest on-going data collection performed by the US Census Bureau and constitutes the most up-to-date and complete data on US residents. It is widely used by private and public entities to understand the population. Additionally, the Rehabilitation Services Administration suggests the ACS as a resource for agencies to rely on for the CSNA process.

Two forms of the ACS are used in this document: 1-year and 5-year estimates. The 1-year estimates report on the results of a single year of ACS surveys, with data weighted to reflect the population at that point in time. The data are extremely accurate and are useful for measuring and understanding large groups within states. The 5-year estimates combine data from the prior five years of ACS data collection, allowing more precision and detail about smaller population groups and sub-populations. However, because data is combined across five years, this data can be somewhat out of date and has difficulty capturing rapid changes or new information.

## Consumer Survey

PCG collaborated with MCB to develop and implement the MCB Consumer Survey. The 63-question survey was designed to collect:

* Basic demographic characteristics
* Individuals’ experiences working with MCB
* Program successes and challenges
* Barriers faced when seeking employment
* Services they used or required
* Other groups they partnered with in the community while seeking a job

Questions varied somewhat depending upon a respondent’s specific answer patterns. Most questions featured multiple choice responses. Many questions also included open text fields for respondents’ additional thoughts. On average, the survey took twenty-four minutes to complete.

PCG hosted the survey on Qualtrics survey software. Several draft survey iterations were rigorously tested by MCB and PCG staff so that the final version ensured functionality and question logic. The survey was also tested and revised to achieve the highest degree of accessibility for individuals who used assistive technology to complete the survey.

MCB sent the survey through an 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
* Youth enrolled in pre-employment transition (Pre-ETS)

Individuals were also allowed proxy responses. In other words, a parent, spouse or caretaker familiar with the targeted individual’s situation and concerns may complete the survey on the individual’s behalf.

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.

## Community Partner Survey

PCG and MCB developed a survey for community partners who take referrals from MCB or work with similar consumer populations. Due to limitations in the sampling frame, this survey was conducted via respondent-driven sampling. Potential respondents received an anonymous link to the online survey instrument. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with other individuals in their organization or outside organizations that would meet the definition of a community partner. As the full extent of the potential sample is unknown, a response rate cannot be calculated for the community partners survey. PCG received a total of 15 completed surveys.

## Key Informant Focus Groups & Interviews

We conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with a variety of audiences 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, and teachers of students with visual impairments who may have received receive Pre-ETS. Table 4 identifies the focus group audiences, the number of focus groups conducted for each audience, and the total number of participants.

Individual MCB consumers proved difficult to reach throughout this research effort. We made multiple outreach attempts and rescheduled groups to accommodate schedules. Despite these efforts, consumer participation was limited. In particular, participation with consumers with closed cases was very low. 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 workarounds to augment consumer participation. We reached 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 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 used the Zoom videoconferencing platform to conduct all focus groups. We chose Zoom because of the relatively high degree of familiarity and accessibility. In addition to taking notes, we recorded these sessions to ensure accuracy of reporting.

In addition to focus groups, PCG conducted one-on-one interviews with providers, teachers, and individuals who were unable to attend focus groups. We conducted these interviews over the platform preferred by the interviewee.

## Case Management Data

PCG analyzed case management data from MCB’s Rehabilitation Services Administration’s (RSA) 911 reports from 2017 through 2019. Specifically, data elements included demographic characteristics and service use of consumers with a case closed between 2017 and 2019. If an individual had multiple cases, we focused on the most recent case or support. 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 differently. These differences prevented us from identifying specific individuals and understanding the characteristics and services they received.

PCG also analyzed data on MCB’s currently active case load. This data was provided to PCG on April 6, 2020. The data reflects the population of open cases at that time.

## Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is critical to understanding the needs and views of any group. Often, it is a first step in a new research process. Qualitative data analysis helps researchers identify and learn about previously unknown issues. Perhaps most importantly, qualitative research supports individuals to express their issues and concerns as they understand and experience them. Individuals use 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. PCG incorporated qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, and consumer surveys into this report. This information informs both broad themes and details.

PCG staff analyzed all qualitative research through the grounded analysis. In this method, analysts 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 that distilled a large body of qualitative data into important, high-level findings. Analysts reviewed notes and recordings of focus groups, interviews, and nearly 1,000 open-ended comments generated by the consumer survey. Synthesized materials informed our findings and recommendations.

# Results

This section provides a detailed description of the results of our research and includes discussion around the analysis of both data and stakeholder outreach efforts.

## Demographic Data

### Population Demographics

#### Age

Table 5 shows the population of open MCB cases and the general Massachusetts population broken down into age groups. MCB VR consumers are younger than people in Massachusetts with a visual impairment. The highest percentage (24.4%) of MCB’s open VR cases belongs to the youngest age group (14-21 year-olds). Conversely, the biggest group (48.2%) of individuals in Massachusetts with a visual impairment are people who are 65 and older. While people 65 and older represent the largest percent of people in MA with visual impairments, they are also the smallest percentage of MCB open cases.

Table : Age of MCB Open Cases

|  | **MCB Open Cases** | **Massachusetts Residents With a Visual Impairment** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 14 to 21 | 24.4% | 4.5% |
| 22 to 29 | 20.0% | 5.4% |
| 30 to 39 | 14.1% | 6.4% |
| 40 to 49 | 13.0% | 9.7% |
| 50 to 59 | 15.2% | 16.8% |
| 60 to 64 | 6.7% | 8.9% |
| 65 and older | 6.6% | 48.2% |

*N=952*

#### Race and Ethnicity

Table 6: Race of MCB Open Cases and Table 7 display the current population of open MCB cases by race and Hispanic ethnicity. These tables show that MCB’s open cases are similarly distributed among American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Other or Multiple Races, as the overall percentages in Massachusetts. The representation of individuals who are Black or African American, as well as individuals who are Hispanic, is roughly 10% higher among MCB open cases than those with visual impairments in Massachusetts. Open case counts among people who are White are 11% less from MCB versus the expected in Massachusetts.

Table : Race of MCB Open Cases

|  | **MCB Open Cases** | **Massachusetts Residents with a Visual Impairment** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 0.1% | 0.5% |
| Asian | 4.2% | 4.0% |
| Black or African American | 19.6% | 9.6% |
| White | 66.9% | 78.1% |
| Other or Multiple races | 8.5% | 7.7% |
| Unknown | 0.6% | 0% |

*N=952*

Table : Ethnicity of MCB Open Cases

|   | **MCB Open Cases** | **Massachusetts Residents with a Visual Impairment** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hispanic or Latino | 12.6% | 2.1% |
| Not Hispanic or Latino | 86.8% | 97.9% |
| Unknown | 0.6% | 0% |

*N=952*

#### Geographic Distribution

Table 8shows the percentage of open MCB cases compared to the projected distribution of individuals who are visually impaired in each Massachusetts county. Currently, MCB consumers are more likely to be in urban counties than expected for individuals with visual impairments in Massachusetts. Suffolk county and the three surrounding counties (Essex, Middlesex and Norfolk) contain almost two thirds (65.8%) of all current MCB participants. Considering population distributions, we would expect that about half (52.6%) of individuals with visual impairments would live in these counties.

Table : Geographic Distribution of MCB Open Cases

|   | **MCB Open Cases** | **Massachusetts Residents With a Visual Impairment** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Barnstable | 1.9% | 3.5% |
| Berkshire | 1.3% | 2.3% |
| Bristol | 7.8% | 9.2% |
| Dukes | 0.2% | <0.1% |
| Essex | 14.4% | 11.5% |
| Franklin | 1.1% | 1.5% |
| Hampden | 7.7% | 8.7% |
| Hampshire | 1.5% | 1.8% |
| Middlesex | 26.3% | 19.7% |
| Norfolk | 8.5% | 6.3% |
| Plymouth | 6.6% | 8.6% |
| Suffolk | 16.6% | 15.1% |
| Worcester | 6.3% | 10.1% |

*N=952*

#### Primary and Secondary Disabilities

Table 9, Table 10 and Table 11 show the types of disabilities among MCB’s open cases. More than three-quarters (78.2%) of those with the primary disability of blindness have no secondary disability, or their secondary disability is also a vision impairment. While blindness alone is the largest group, MCB also serves many people with deaf-blindness.

Note that PCG had to recode and group disability categories in order to complete this analysis, as several groups within MCB data were too small to analyze independently. See Appendix 9.1 for more detail on category groupings.

Table : Primary Disability of MCB Open Cases

|   | MCB Open Cases |
| --- | --- |
| None Listed | 1.6% |
| Blindness | 95.6% |
| Deaf-Blindness | 1.8% |
| Other Physical Impairment | 0.1% |
| Other Visual Impairments | 0.9% |

*N=952*

Table : Secondary Disability of MCB Open Cases

|   | MCB Open Cases |
| --- | --- |
| None Listed | 52.1% |
| Blindness | 26.5% |
| Mobility, dexterity, and other physical impairments | 10.1% |
| Cognitive and other mental impairments | 6.6% |
| Deafness and hearing loss | 2.5% |
| Other Impairments | 2.2% |

*N=952*

Table : Secondary Disability by Primary Disability of MCB Open Cases

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|   |   | **Primary Disability** |
|   |   | **Blindness** | **Deaf-Blindness** | **Other Physical Impairment** | **Other Visual Impairments** |
| **Secondary Disability** | **None Listed** | 50.8% | 64.7% | 100.0% | 77.8% |
| **Blindness** | 27.4% | 11.8% | 0.0% | 11.1% |
| **Cognitive and other mental impairments** | 6.8% | 5.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| **Mobility, dexterity and other physical impairments** | 10.4% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 11.1% |
| **Deafness and hearing loss** | 2.3% | 17.6% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| **Other Impairments** | 2.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |

*N=952*

#### Significance of Disability

Table 12 shows the distribution of determination of disability significance for open MCB VR cases. This is a federally specified measure determined by the number of functional limitations the VR counselor identifies during the eligibility process. The categories from least to most impact include ‘non-significantly disability’, ‘significantly disability’, and ‘most significantly disability’.

An individual with a ***significant disability*** is an individual who has a severe physical, mental or sensory impairment or combination of impairments that creates significant limitations in one or more functional capacities that prevents successful employment. They are expected to require multiple VR services that contribute to the achievement of competitive integrated employment over an extended period of time to complete.

**An individual with a *most significant disability*** an individual who has a severe physical, mental or sensory impairment or combination of impairments that creates significant limitations in two or more functional capacities that prevents successful employment. Their vocational rehabilitation requires two or more VR services that contribute to the achievement of competitive integrated employment; and these VR services may require 6 months or more from the date that services are initiated to complete.

Almost three-quarters (73.9%) have a significant disability. The “Most Significantly Disabled” category makes up the remaining individuals.

Table : Significance of Disability Among MCB Open Cases

|   | MCB Open Cases |
| --- | --- |
| Significantly Disabled | 73.9% |
| Most Significantly Disabled | 24.6% |
| Undetermined | 1.5% |

*N=952*

According to MCB’s RSA 911 data, the rate MCB serves individuals who are most significantly disabled, as seen in Table 13 has increased notably since 2017. This includes both opened and closed cases in these years. In 2017, 6.5% of MCB participants were listed as most significantly disabled. This grew to 21.4% by 2019.

Table : Most Significant Disability

|   | Significant disability | Most significantly disabled | *n* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2017 | 93.5% | 6.5% | 1067 |
| 2018 | 84.8% | 15.2% | 1324 |
| 2019 | 78.6% | 21.4% | 1345 |

### Employment

#### Unemployment and Labor Force Participation

Unemployment and labor force participation rates are important metrics to track to understand the overall employment landscape of a state. The following is based on the 2018 ACS 1-year estimates, published by the US Census Bureau. Recent labor market changes brought by COVID-19 have increased unemployment rates and decreased labor force participation across the country. PCG also investigated the most common job categories pursued by VR participants, showing that they are most likely to be employed in retail sales, customer service, and teaching positions. Data from the Massachusetts Department of Labor suggests that these industries have been heavily impacted by COVID-19, and are more likely to have had significant job losses. It is very likely that the actual rates today are much higher than these measurements. However, this is the most recent data with enough detail to understand individuals with disability PCG could access.

Table 8: Labor Force Participation Rates in Massachusetts (2018 ACS) shows the current rate of individuals ages 18 to 64 in Massachusetts who are in the labor force. The ‘Individuals with No Disability’ column shows the rates for people who do not report having a disability that limits their ability to work. The ‘disability’ column shows rates for those that report having at least one disability. The final column, ‘visual disability’, reports the rates for those who report having trouble seeing, even while wearing glasses.

An individual is ‘in the labor force’ if they are either currently employed, or if they are not currently employed but have been looking for a job. Within the last three months, these individuals may be applying for jobs, interviewing for jobs, or doing other job seeking actions. Otherwise, they are not in the labor force. More than half of those with a visual disability in Massachusetts are currently in the labor force.

Table 14 shows the rate of individuals in the labor force were either employed or are unemployed. Table 15 shows the employment and unemployment rate of those in the labor force. Individuals with a visual disability are less likely to be employed than those without any disability (92.2% to 95.7%). There is a larger difference between individuals with a visual disability and those with a disability (92.2% to 88.1%).

Table : Labor Force Participation Rates in Massachusetts (2018 1-year ACS)

|   | Massachusetts | Individuals with No Disability | Individuals with a Disability | Individuals with a Visual Disability |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total Number | 4,362,578 | 3,978,445 | 384,133 | 62,691 |
| In Labor Force | 80.2% | 83.7% | 43.3% | 51.7% |
| Not in Labor Force | 19.8% | 16.3% | 56.7% | 48.3% |

Table : Employment and Unemployment rates in Massachusetts (2018 1-year ACS)

|   | Massachusetts | Individuals with No Disability | Individuals with a Disability | Individuals with a Visual Disability |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total in Labor Force | 3,497,195 | 3,330,676 | 166,519 | 32,404 |
| Employed | 95.3% | 95.7% | 88.1% | 92.2% |
| Unemployed | 4.7% | 4.3% | 11.9% | 7.8% |

PCG also used ACS 5-year estimates to produce similar labor force participation and employment rates for youth age 16 to 21. The ACS does not collect employment data on individuals under age 16. Table 16 and Table 17 show similar patterns to adult rates. Individuals with visual disabilities are more likely to participate in the labor force and be employed than the population of individuals with disabilities in general. Youth with visual disabilities are less likely to be employed than youth without a disability.

Table : LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES IN MASSACHUSETTS (2018 5-YEAR ACS, Age 16-21)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | Massachusetts | Individuals with No Disability | Individuals with a Disability | Individuals with a Visual Disability |
| Total Number | 582,126 | 544,552 | 37,249 | 4,626 |
| In Labor Force | 51.2% | 52.0% | 39.5% | 44.1% |
| Not in Labor Force | 48.8% | 48.0% | 60.5% | 55.9% |

Table 17: Employment and Unemployment IN MASSACHUSETTS (2018 5-YEAR ACS, AGE 16-21)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | Massachusetts | Individuals with No Disability | Individuals with a Disability | Individuals with a Visual Disability |
| Total in Labor Force | 297,913 | 283,211 | 14,702 | 2,041 |
| Employed | 86.0% | 86.7% | 73.8% | 81.3% |
| Unemployed | 14.0% | 13.3% | 26.2% | 18.7% |

### Potential Service Population

The potential service population in Table 18 represents individuals with visual disabilities who could potentially be served by MCB’s VR services but are not currently in their service population. Individuals are considered part of the population service population if they are:

1. Currently unemployed (in the labor force, but do not have a job)
2. Not receiving MCB services

To calculate the potential service population, those currently using MCB are removed from the population of unemployed individuals with a visual disability. In other words, the following formula calculates the potential service population:

**Unemployed individuals with a visual disability – MCB cases = potentially unserved individuals**

This calculation uses the 2018 1-year ACS estimates. MCB currently serves approximately 38% of potential job seekers with visual impairments.

Table : Potential MCB VR Service Population

| Number of Unemployed Individuals with a Visual Disability | Currently Open MCB VR Caseload | Number of Potentially Unserved Individuals |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2,513 | 952 | 1,561 |

### Employment at Closure

The most common jobs taken by MCB VR closures are presented in Table 19 along with the number of placements to those jobs from 2017 to 2019 within RSA 911 data.

Table : Most Common Employment by MCB Closures by Standard Occupation Code Category

| SOC Code | Title | Number of Placements |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 434051 | Customer Service Representatives | 21 |
| 253099 | Teachers, All Other | 14 |
| 412031 | Retail Salespersons | 13 |
| 211029 | Social Workers, All Other | 10 |
| 211019 | Counselors, All Other | 5 |
| 439199 | Office and Administrative Support Workers, All Other  | 8 |

Among MCB VR cases that exited with employment, the average hourly wage was $20.30. The average number of hours worked each week was 30.2 hours. This equates to an annual wage of $30,350, assuming a fifty-week annual work year. On average, members of racial and ethnic minority groups work more hours at a lower wage than other MCB VR closures. For reference, according to the ACS, the average working age white adult in Massachusetts made $47,143 in 2018, while the average non-white working adult made $33,369 in 2018.

Table : Wages and Hours at Exit by Age for Employed Closed Cases (2017-2019)

| Age |   | Hourly Wage at Exit | Weekly Hours at Exit |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 22 to 34 | Mean | $20.00 | 32.4 |
| *N* | 79 | 79 |
| 35 to 44 | Mean | $21.24 | 31.4 |
| *N* | 61 | 61 |
| 45 to 54 | Mean | $20.79 | 28.0 |
| *N* | 68 | 68 |
| 55 to 64 | Mean | $24.76 | 30.0 |
| *N* | 73 | 73 |
| 65 and older | Mean | $25.37 | 28.9 |
| *N* | 55 | 55 |

Table : Wages And Hours At Exit By Minority Status For Employed Closed Cases (2017-2019)

| Racial or ethnic minority |   | Hourly Wage at Exit | Weekly Hours at Exit |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not a racial or ethnic minority | Mean | $23.63 | 29.7 |
| *N* | 250 | 250 |
| Racial or ethnic minority | Mean | $18.41 | 31.9 |
| *N* | 86 | 86 |

Table 22: Wages And Hours At Exit By Significance Of Disability For Employed Closed Cases (2017-2019)

| Significance of Disability |   | Hourly Wage at Exit | Weekly Hours at Exit |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Significant disability | Mean | $22.15 | 30.1 |
| *N* | 289 | 289 |
| Most significant disability | Mean | $23.21 | 31.3 |
| *N* | 47 | 47 |

**Case Closure Status**

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

***Ineligible*** cases are those cases with a closure reason beyond MCB’s control. These include closure reasons such as institutionalization, health/medical reasons, death, or being ineligible for services. It also includes individuals who exited MCB services before eligibility was determined, no matter their reason for closure. The following categories are Exit Reasons, and are considered “Ineligible”:

* Institutionalized
* Health/Medical
* Ineligible
* No disabling condition
* No impediment to employment
* Does not require VR service
* Disability too significant to benefit from services
* Transferred to another agency

These cases were not included in Table 17: Case Close Reasons as 100% individuals who had this case closure reason were ineligible. Several reasons of ineligibility are included below as the reasons resulted in varying case closure status.

***Closed Successful*** cases are exclusively those cases closed with 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 23 displays the specific closure reasons documented in the RSA 911 data provided, and the final categorization of cases.

Table 23: Case Close Reasons

| **RSA Case Exit Reason** | **Closed Successful** | **Closed Unsuccessful** | **Ineligible** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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%** |

*N=687*

A small group of cases (60) left VR services with a closure status, and then opened a new case (some of which had then themselves closed). These cases are considered differently in other areas of this report. The demographic analysis, which describes the population served by MCB, uses the most recent case closure. All prior cases are eliminated from demographics analysis. These prior cases are not included because analyzing multiple entries of the same person would present a misleading description of MCB’s service population. Sections analyzing outcomes encompass all case closures, including those with multiple cases.

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 to perform meaningful analysis.

**Significance of Disability**

An individual with a ***significant disability*** is an individual who has a severe physical, mental or sensory impairment or combination of impairments that creates significant limitations in one or more functional capacities that prevents successful employment. They are expected to require multiple VR services that contribute to the achievement of competitive integrated employment over an extended period of time to complete.

**An individual with a *most significant disability*** an individual who has a severe physical, mental or sensory impairment or combination of impairments that creates significant limitations in two or more functional capacities that prevents successful employment. Their vocational rehabilitation requires two or more VR services that contribute to the achievement of competitive integrated employment; and these VR services may require 6 months or more from the date that services are initiated to complete.

Table 24 shows both the successful and unsuccessful closure percentages by significance of disability. Individuals with a most significant disability are more likely to close successfully than individuals with a significant disability. This is also a useful predictor of success (see Appendix 9.3).

Table 24: Case Closure By Significance Of Disability

|   | **Closed Successful** | **Closed Unsuccessful** | **Ineligible** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Significant disability | 50.0% | 41.4% | 8.5% |
| Most significant disability | 56.6% | 32.5% | 10.8% |

*N=615*

A weak relationship exists between the age of an individual and their likelihood of successful case closure. Table 25 shows a breakdown of successful and unsuccessful closures for each age group. Older individuals are slightly more likely to close their cases successfully, though this is not without exception.

Table : Case Closure Reason by Age

|   | **Closed Successful** | **Closed Unsuccessful** | **Ineligible** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 14 to 21 | 0.0% | 35.1% | 64.9% |
| 22 to 34 | 42.9% | 34.9% | 22.3% |
| 35 to 44 | 41.9% | 33.3% | 24.8% |
| 45 to 54 | 50.0% | 33.1% | 16.9% |
| 55 to 64 | 40.0% | 34.1% | 25.9% |
| 65 and older | 45.1% | 26.5% | 28.3% |
| Unknown | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |

*N=754*

There are some notable differences when examining MCB case closures by race and ethnicity. Table 26 and Table 27 show the rates of successful and unsuccessful case closures for each race and ethnicity group. Individuals who are identified as Hispanic are notably less likely to have their case closed as a successful, competitive, integrated employment outcome. Individuals who identified as white are more likely to close their case successfully – except individuals who identified as Native American, which represent a small number of cases. To some degree, these factors also compound with non-Hispanic whites having similar, but slightly improved, rates of closed successful cases.

Table : Case Closure Reason by Race

|   | **Closed Successful** | **Closed Unsuccessful** | **Ineligible** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Native American | 50.0% | 50.0% | 0.0% |
| White | 47.1% | 34.2% | 18.7% |
| Black | 38.5% | 38.5% | 23.1% |
| Asian | 37.8% | 37.8% | 24.3% |
| Multiple races | 16.7% | 66.7% | 16.7% |
| Pacific Islander | 0.0% | 50.0% | 50.0% |
| Unknown | 0.0% | 1.7% | 98.3% |

*N=756*

Table : Case Closure Reason by Ethnicity

|   | **Closed Successful** | **Closed Unsuccessful** | **Ineligible** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Non-Hispanic White | 47.5% | 33.2% | 19.3% |
| All other | 38.5% | 41.0% | 20.5% |
| Unknown | 0.0% | 1.7% | 98.3% |

*N=756*

## Survey Results

### Respondents and Characteristics

There are several overarching findings from the results of the consumer survey. These results include responses from individuals with active and closed cases. Over half of the respondents agreed that:

* Their MCB counselor respected their culture, background, and identity; their counselor responded in a timely way to their questions, concerns, or needs;
* Their counselor explained why they were eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services;
* They received services in a place that was convenient for them;
* MCB provided them with the technology or equipment they needed to receive services; and that
* MCB provided the accommodations they needed to receive services.

The top five barriers identified through the consumer survey were transportation (by almost 70% of respondents reporting a barrier); employer attitudes toward people with disabilities; resources for people with disabilities; potential loss of benefits, and poor job market or a lack of opportunities.

The following sections provide further analysis and detail on the results of the consumer survey.

### The MCB VR Consumer Experience

The following section provides a summary of survey results related to the experience of the MCB consumer. Results are provided across all cases, as well as by members of minority groups. This includes racial minorities, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBT+ community. These groups are combined to produce a larger sample and understand the collective feedback from minority consumers.

#### VR Services

PCG surveyed both active and closed case individuals on their service experiences. Table 23: Survey Responses on Service Experience describe satisfaction on the service experience of all consumers**.** Each column, or category, shows the percent of individuals who agree with the statement. While most respondents agreed with statements, there are some exceptions.

* Over half of respondents believe they received the testing and assessments they needed.
* Less than half of respondents (46%) affirmed they helped develop their IPE.
* Less than half of individuals agreed that MCB offices and services were available via public transportation.
* Only 35.2% of individuals found MCB offices easily navigated.

While these exceptions are notable, they could be due to calculation methods. To determine rates of agreement and disagreement, “Unsure” responses were grouped with those who disagree. However, being unsure may indicate a lack of information rather than displeasure. For example, individuals may have marked “Unsure” because they had not visited an MCB office.

Survey responses on service experience in Table 28 are provided across all cases, and then divided to show the responses of individuals who are minorities. Members of minority groups were less likely than others to report agreeing that they got the services and accommodations in a place convenient for them they need compared to non-minority respondents. However, consumers in the minority group were more likely to find MCB offices open at convenient times. Each of the individual differences in other categories are small and disappear into the margin of error. The largest difference was in receiving the testing or assessments the consumer needed, where minority participants were 9.8-percentage points less likely to agree.

Table : Survey Responses on Service Experience[[5]](#footnote-6)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** | **Difference** |
| I receive services in a place that is convenient for me. [A/D] | 81.4% | 87.8% | 78.0% | -9.8% |
| I can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services [A/D] | 45.2% | 45.5% | 48.8% | 3.3% |
| I can get around easily in MCB offices. [A/D] | 35.2% | 35.2% | 39.0% | 3.8% |
| The MCB office is open at times that work for me. [A/D] | 57.1% | 58.2% | 65.9% | 7.7% |
| MCB provided the accommodations I needed to receive services. [A/D] | 73.5% | 72.4% | 78.0% | 5.7% |
| MCB provided me with the technology or equipment I needed to receive services. [A/D] | 74.4% | 78.2% | 75.6% | -2.6% |
| I received the testing or assessments I needed. [A/D] | 52.7% | 53.7% | 48.8% | -4.9% |
| I helped develop my plan or IPE [A/D] | 45.5% | 46.0% | 48.8% | 2.8% |

*N>=217*

PCG also broke out survey responses for Pre-ETS eligible individuals. Table 29 shows the total number of individuals who agreed, disagreed, or were unsure about each question. In total, we received 33 surveys submitted by individuals eligible for Pre-ETS. By and large, respondents agree with most of the statements. A majority of respondents indicated they were ‘Unsure’ on three questions. Most individuals were unable, unsure, or did not wish to comment on the use of public transportation, their ability to get around easily within MCB offices, or whether they had been involved in their Individual Plan for Employment. The uncertainty of these responses may be the result of receiving Pre-ETS at their school. Students may not have used public transportation or visited an MCB office. Because MCB does not require eligibility to participate in Pre-ETS, students may not have had an Individual Plan for Employment.

Table : Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals’ Responses To Participant Survey - Services

| **Survey Question** | **Agree** | **Disagree** | **Unsure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I receive MCB services in a convenient place. | 28 | 3 | 1 |
| I can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services. | 12 | 6 | 14 |
| I can get around easily in MCB offices. | 8 | 1 | 23 |
| The MCB office is open at times that work for me. | 21 | 1 | 10 |
| MCB provided the accommodations I needed to receive services.  | 27 | 1 | 4 |
| MCB provided me with the technology or equipment I needed to receive services. | 21 | 3 | 8 |
| I received the testing or assessments I needed. | 20 | 3 | 9 |
| I helped develop my plan or IPE. | 15 | 2 | 15 |

#### VR counselor experience

PCG also surveyed respondents on their experiences with VR counselors. Table 30 shows the percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement. Among those reporting on their experiences working directly with MCB, all except one statement garnered a majority of agreement. MCB achieved high marks (over 80%) in respecting client culture, background, and identity as well as addressing questions and concerns in a timely way. Two other categories are notable. Only 40.5% of respondents agree that the counselor helped them understand their career options. Only half of individuals felt their counselor talked to them about their choices when developing their plan for employment. Generally, members of a minority group responding to the survey responded more positively than their non-minority counterparts. The largest difference between non-minorities and minorities was 14.6%. **Experiences[[6]](#footnote-7)**

Table : Counselor Interactions

|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** | **Difference** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| My counselor respects my culture, background, and identity. [A/D] | 80.5% | 79.8% | 78.0% | -1.8% |
| My counselor responded in a timely way to my questions, concerns, or needs. [A/D] | 74.4% | 79.0% | 72.5% | -6.5% |
| My counselor considered my interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing my rehabilitation plan. [A/D] | 60.8% | 60.5% | 65.9% | 5.4% |
| My counselor explained why I was eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. [A/D] | 62.9% | 63.4% | 61.0% | -2.4% |
| My counselor informed me of my rights during the VR process. [A/D] | 58.2% | 56.2% | 62.5% | 6.3% |
| My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment. [A/D] | 50.5% | 48.8% | 63.4% | 14.6% |
| My counselor helped me understand the sorts of careers I can pursue. [A/D] | 40.5% | 40.3% | 46.3% | 6.0% |

*N>=201*

Regarding consumer experiences within the Pre-ETS eligible responses, most individuals agreed with each statement. The number for each response is shown in Table 31. Of note, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that their counselor respected their culture, background, and identity. No individuals disagreed with that statement. No individual statements garnered significant or notable disagreement. A few questions resulted in a high number of “unsure” responses. Similar to responses on service experience, Pre-ETS eligible respondents may not have had relevant experience due to the services they were receiving. For example, a respondent may not have discussed a rehabilitation plan for employment with a counselor because they did not yet have a plan.

Table : Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals' Responses To Participant Survey - Experiences

| **Survey Question** | **Agree** | **Disagree** | **Unsure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| My counselor explained why I was eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services | 19 | 1 | 2 |
| My counselor helped me understand the sorts of careers I can pursue. | 16 | 4 | 12 |
| My counselor respects my culture, background, and identity. | 28 | 0 | 4 |
| My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment. | 17 | 2 | 13 |
| My counselor considered my interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing my rehabilitation plan. | 19 | 2 | 11 |
| My counselor informed me of my rights during the VR process. | 17 | 2 | 13 |
| My counselor responded in a timely way to my questions, concerns, or needs. | 24 | 5 | 2 |

#### Barriers

Table 32 shows the barriers experienced by respondents across categories of basic human needs. Overall, transportation was the greatest single barrier, with 63.9% of participants experiencing this problem. Housing also proved to be a significant issue, with 22.6% experiencing housing issues. Notably, there is a large disparity in housing between non-minorities and minority groups. Over a quarter of members of a minority group report housing issues, while 16% of individuals who are non-minorities experienced housing issues. Participants identified all other barriers were in responses, including a large contingent citing “other basic needs” barriers. Members of a minority group experienced barriers at a higher level than non-minorities across five categories: housing, food, clothing, childcare, and other basic needs. The only category that members of a minority reported slightly less frequently than non-minorities was transportation.

Table : Basic Needs Barriers

|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Housing | 22.6% | 16.0% | 28.6% |
| Transportation | 63.9% | 64.0% | 62.9% |
| Childcare | 5.8% | 3.0% | 8.6% |
| Food | 11.0% | 7.0% | 17.1% |
| Clothing | 9.0% | 5.0% | 14.3% |
| Some other basic need(s)  | 21.3% | 22.0% | 25.7% |

*N=155*

**Legal Barriers**

Table 33 outlines the barriers that legal challenges posed to consumers. Respondents reported legal barriers at far lower rates than other barrier categories. Almost one fifth of respondents reported experience some other legal need outside of immigration, discrimination cases, or criminal offenses. Respondents identified other legal barrier categories, but not to significant amounts. Minority participants show slightly higher rates of immigration status and discrimination case status barriers, but lower rates of criminal offenses or other legal barriers.

Table : Legal Barriers

|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Criminal offenses | 0.6% | 1.0% | 0.0% |
| Immigration status | 3.9% | 4.0% | 5.7% |
| An ongoing discrimination case | 3.2% | 3.0% | 5.7% |
| Some other legal need(s)  | 18.1% | 21.0% | 11.4% |

*N=155*

**Financial Barriers**

Table 34 shows the financial barriers to services and working. Except for Benefits Counseling, all other categories proved to be significant barriers. Over one third of respondents identified Available resources for people with disabilities as a barrier. In general, members of a minority group cited barriers at higher levels than those not in a minority group. Also notable is that Benefits Counseling does prove to be a significant barrier among members of minority groups compared to the non-minority group.

Table : Financial Barriers

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| Potential loss of benefits | 27.7% | 30.0% | 25.7% |
| More money | 24.5% | 20.0% | 37.1% |
| Educational or training funding | 21.3% | 18.0% | 28.6% |
| Benefits counseling | 12.9% | 11.0% | 17.1% |
| Additional benefits (medical coverage, dental coverage) | 18.1% | 19.0% | 17.1% |
| Resources for people with disabilities | 34.2% | 36.0% | 37.1% |
| Some other financial need(s)  | 9.7% | 11.0% | 5.7% |

*N=155*

**Job-Related Barriers**

Outside of the previously cited transportation, participants reported job-related barriers as the most significant barriers. Table 35 breaks down the types of barriers in this category. Almost half of respondents identified “Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities” as a barrier to work. Over one third of participants also cited “Poor job market or lack of opportunities” and “Limited work experience” as barriers to work. At least one out of every six respondents encounter each job-related barriers. Except for limited work experience, members of a minority group showed higher rates of experiencing these barriers.

Table : Job-Related Barriers

|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities | 45.2% | 47.0% | 54.3% |
| Poor job market or a lack of opportunities | 33.5% | 33.0% | 34.3% |
| Limited relevant job skills | 16.8% | 15.0% | 22.9% |
| Limited work experience | 24.5% | 25.0% | 20.0% |
| Lack of opportunities to explore careers | 24.5% | 20.0% | 37.1% |
| Some other job-related challenge(s) | 18.7% | 19.0% | 22.9% |

*N=155*

Pre-ETS eligible individuals also identified their barriers to employment. Table 36 shows the total number of individuals in the survey and how many selected at least one barrier within each broad category. Eight of the thirteen respondents who identified a barrier in basic needs chose Transportation as the major issue. Three individuals selected multiple Basic Needs barriers. The five respondents who selected the Legal barrier identified the “Other” category. Only one respondent provided additional information (it was related to guardianship). Respondents showed a broad range of experiences in the Financial category. No single financial category captured a majority of these participants. No respondents identified “Benefits Counseling” as a barrier. Job-Related Challenges represent the most significant area of encountered barriers with 14 individuals having experienced a barrier within this category with fairly equal distribution among specific barriers. Most notably, 8 of the 14 individuals reported multiple job-related challenges, with five respondents encountering three or more Job-Related barriers.

Table : Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals' Responses To Participant Survey - Barriers

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***n*** | **Basic Needs** | **Legal** | **Financial** | **Job-Related Challenges** |
| 33 | 13 | 5 | 11 | 14 |

**Other Barriers**

The survey for community partners and service providers asked those groups to identify potential additional barriers they saw as most common among high needs groups, such as individuals with most significant disabilities, members of minority groups, and Pre-ETS consumers. These responses were scattered, and did not point to any systemic need of any of these groups. Responses that did appear were similar for all three groups, and included transportation, the need for more work opportunities, and barriers created by the perception among family and employers. However, these limited responses do not point to any widespread issue with the services or supports provided by MCB or its partners.

*“Transportation services are not flexible enough. Ride routes can be cruelly long. Not enough vouchers for the shared ride pilot program.” – Service Provider*

### Transition-Aged Youth (Pre-ETS questions)

PCG targeted questions specific to Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). A total of 33 respondents were classified as eligible for Pre-ETS. Table 37 shows the number of respondents who say they receive services, need services, or don’t need services. For those survey questions directly aimed at the Pre-ETS and populations, there is a significant number of Pre-ETS eligible individuals who may be under-served or unserved. Depending on the service category, the number of individuals who have not received a service, but said they need it for it falls anywhere between 20-40%. While the survey sample is low, this points to the possibility of a wider gap in services. Additionally, individuals who responded “Yes” to the questions did so mostly across all questions, while those individuals selecting “No, but I need this” also did so largely across the board, indicating that service gaps are with Pre-ETS availability rather than individual components not being offered. Table 38 shows the settings where services were performed. Respondents received the majority of Pre-ETS in either a school classroom or facility setting. Four individuals reported that they received Pre-ETS in a community-based setting with both people with disabilities and some without.

Table : Pre-ETS

| **Survey Question** | **Yes** | **No, but I need this** | **No, I do not need this** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Have you received counseling to help you explore what kind of careers you might want to pursue? | 10 | 5 | 6 |
| 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. | 16 | 4 | 3 |
| Have you received counseling on your choices for education after high school ends? | 10 | 6 | 7 |
| 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. | 13 | 6 | 3 |
| Have you received training in self-advocacy? | 14 | 7 | 3 |

Table 38: Settings for Pre-ETS

| **While you were getting these services were you in…?** | **# of Individuals** |
| --- | --- |
| A community-based setting, with some people with disabilities and some people without | 4 |
| A school classroom | 13 |
| A facility that only helps people with disabilities | 7 |

### Community Partners and Coordination

Table 39 shows the key partners identifies the reported key partners for individuals all cases. As expected, some key partnerships stand out with others very rarely utilized. Close to half of all respondents were working with the Carroll Center for the Blind. MassHealth also proved to be a significant partner for many with 33.9% of respondents selecting them. Other key partners were post-secondary schools and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. PCG also measured MCB’s coordination with the partnerships. Respondents scored partners on a rating scale from 1 to 4, with 4 being the best mark possible. Table 40 shows these scores. Overall, MCB’s coordination with partners received a rating of 3.3 out of 4, which corresponds to good coordination.

Table : Key Partners Of Individuals With All Cases

|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Carroll Center for the Blind | 45.9% | 46.5% | 50.0% |
| MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) | 33.9% | 32.4% | 35.7% |
| Perkins School for the Blind | 32.1% | 29.6% | 32.1% |
| Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities) | 15.6% | 15.5% | 14.3% |
| Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission | 11.9% | 12.7% | 7.1% |
| Someone else (Who was that?) | 11.9% | 15.5% | 3.6% |
| MAB Community Services | 11.0% | 14.1% | 7.1% |
| Department of Education (K-12) | 6.4% | 5.6% | 7.1% |
| Department of Elder Services | 5.5% | 4.2% | 3.6% |
| One-Stop Career Center | 3.7% | 4.2% | 3.6% |
| Department of Developmental Services | 2.8% | 1.4% | 0.0% |
| Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | 1.8% | 0.0% | 7.1% |
| Massachusetts Office on Disability | 1.8% | 1.4% | 3.6% |
| Department of Public Health | 0.9% | 0.0% | 3.6% |
| Lowell Association for the Blind | 0.9% | 1.4% | 0.0% |

*N=109*

Table 40: MCB Partnership Coordination Rating

|  | **Score** | ***N*** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **All Cases** | 3.3 | 78 |
| **Not a minority** | 3.4 | 51 |
| **Member of a minority** | 3.4 | 21 |

Table 41 reports which MCB services respondents used. Respondents identified independent living skills training and transportation most frequently. Close to one in five survey respondents received independent living skills training directly from MCB, and 14% received transportation services from MCB. Table 42 shows the services individuals utilized that were coordinated by MCB. Similar to MCB provided services, independent skills training and transportation were the most used. MCB coordinated transportation for 16.4% of respondents.

Table : MCB-Provided Support Services

|  | **All Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 7.1% | 9.7% | 7.3% |
| Group and peer support | 5.8% | 8.1% | 4.9% |
| Help with housing | 3.6% | 4.0% | 7.3% |
| Independent living skills training | 18.2% | 24.2% | 24.4% |
| Social security benefits counseling | 7.1% | 8.9% | 12.2% |
| Moving from a group home facility to independent living | 0.9% | 0.0% | 4.9% |
| Help with transportation | 13.8% | 17.7% | 19.5% |
| Unsure | 6.7% | 8.1% | 7.3% |

*N=107*

Table : MCB-Coordinated Services

|  | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 1.8% | 2.4% | 0.0% |
| Group and peer support | 4.4% | 6.5% | 4.9% |
| Help with housing | 3.1% | 4.0% | 4.9% |
| Independent living skills training | 11.1% | 14.5% | 17.1% |
| Social security benefits counseling | 5.8% | 7.3% | 9.8% |
| Moving from a group home facility to independent living | 0.4% | 0.0% | 2.4% |
| Help with transportation | 16.4% | 23.4% | 14.6% |
| Something else | 3.1% | 5.6% | 0.0% |

*N=107*

**Community Partners’ View of Services**

Overall, community partners who responded to the survey had an extremely high opinion of MCB and the services it offered. While they did provide some comment and areas for suggested focus, the majority of feedback about MCB was highly positive. This group perceived MCB as an active and effective partner, and sees MCB staff as generally highly skilled and interested in consumer success. However, community partners identify a few areas for MCB to improve. Keep in mind that the number of community partners involved in this survey was limited. Table 43 shows the percentage of respondents who agreed or were unsure about each statement. Asked to rate how well they felt MCB was performing certain key tasks, community partners were much more likely to report being unsure if MCB was completing certain tasks than to disagree across all items. Table 43 shows the percentage of respondents who agreed or were unsure about each statement. On some items, a majority of responding partners were unsure of MCB’s performance in an area.

While this is better than partners disagreeing, it suggests that partners may not be fully aware of the full scope of MCB services. This would suggest that they may not be able to guide consumers toward the services they need to be most successful.

Table : Community Partners Agreement With Key Aspects Of Services

|  | **Agree** | **Unsure** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The individuals I work with receive MCB services in a convenient place. | 72.7% | 27.3% |
| 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. | 72.7% | 27.3% |
| 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. | 72.7% | 18.2% |
| Individuals that I work with receive the testing or assessments they need. | 45.5% | 45.5% |
| Individuals I work with help to develop their own IPE (Individual Plan for Employment). | 41.7% | 58.3% |
| MCB collaborates successfully with my organization to support people with visual impairments in achieving their employment goals. | 66.7% | 33.3% |

*N>=11*

Likewise, a high proportion of responding community partners said they were unsure of the adequacy of community supports in their community. This is reflected in Table 44. Some community partners did perceive housing supports and independent living skills training available to consumers in their community as ‘never adequate’. Again, the response for this survey was relatively low and results should be read with caution.

Table : Adequacy Of Community Supports

| *Please rate the quality of the following community supports in your community…* | **Never Adequate** | **Rarely Adequate** | **Sometimes Adequate** | **Always Adequate** | **Unsure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Referrals to community resources** | 0% | 0% | 75% | 13% | 13% |
| **Family and caregiver support** | 0% | 0% | 50% | 13% | 38% |
| **Group and peer support** | 0% | 13% | 38% | 0% | 50% |
| **Housing** | 13% | 50% | 0% | 0% | 38% |
| **Independent living skills training** | 13% | 13% | 50% | 13% | 13% |
| **Medical care** | 0% | 0% | 25% | 0% | 75% |
| **Social security benefit planning** | 0% | 0% | 25% | 0% | 75% |
| **Transition services from institution to community** | 0% | 0% | 38% | 13% | 50% |
| **Transportation** | 0% | 11% | 56% | 0% | 33% |

*N>=10*

Across open-ended responses, community partners identified a lack of technology and funding as being among their concerns for the consumers they serve. This was often intermingled with concerns over self-advocacy, basic life skills, and adjustment skills, as well as general praise of MCB and its services and staff.

*“Transportation and benefits counseling are the two greatest barriers to employment.”*

*– Service Provider*

### Provider Capacity

Table 45 illustrates consumer perception in provider capacity. Notably, 36% of cases indicated that there were no service gaps. The remaining 64% of cases identified at least one gap in services. Respondents identified the length of time it takes to get a job and lack of staff as the two largest gaps in provider capacity. Additionally, members of a minority group were more likely to report gaps in services. The number of members of a minority group experiencing these gaps is more than double that of non-minority consumers. Only 22.2% of consumers who are part of a minority group experienced no service gaps.

Table 46 shows how consumers rate the importance of training directly in a rehabilitation center. Over 80% of respondents indicated training in a rehabilitation center as an important factor in service delivery. Also notable is that all members of a minority group who responded agreed that services in a rehabilitation center is important.

Table : Gaps In Services Provided By The CRP Services

| *Were there gaps in service provided by the CRP services?* | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Takes a long time to get a job** | 27.3% | 18.2% | 44.4% |
| **Not enough staff** | 22.7% | 9.1% | 33.3% |
| **Not enough providers for a specific population** | 4.5% | 0.0% | 11.1% |
| **Not enough staff with the skills needed to support different needs** | 13.6% | 9.1% | 22.2% |
| **Something else** | 4.5% | 0.0% | 11.1% |
| **There are no service gaps** | 36.4% | 45.5% | 22.2% |

*N=22*

Table : Importance of Training in a Rehabilitation Center

| *How important is training in a rehabilitation center?* | **All Cases** | **Non-minority consumers** | **Minority Consumers** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Very important** | 61.9% | 54.5% | 77.8% |
| **Somewhat important** | 19.0% | 18.2% | 22.2% |
| **Not at all important** | 9.5% | 9.1% | 0.0% |
| **Unsure** | 9.5% | 18.2% | 0.0% |

*N= 21*

While community partners are generally very positive about MCB services and staff, they are much less likely to see the employment supports in their communities meeting the present level of need. Asked about a range of employment related supports, community partners were unlikely to state that they were always adequate to meet the level of need present as seen in Table 47. Community partners perceive at least some level of unmet need, even if they are very satisfied with MCB services as they presently exist.

Table : Adequacy of Employment Supports

| *Please rate the quality of the following employment related supports in your community…* | **Rarely Adequate** | **Sometimes Adequate** | **Always Adequate** | **Unsure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Vocational counseling** | 11% | 67% | 0% | 22% |
| **Technical training** | 0% | 63% | 25% | 13% |
| **Academic education** | 0% | 67% | 11% | 22% |
| **Vocational tuitionassistance** | 11% | 56% | 0% | 33% |
| **Job placements** | 22% | 44% | 11% | 22% |
| **Job coaching** | 11% | 56% | 11% | 22% |
| **Self-employment supports** | 11% | 33% | 11% | 44% |
| **Post-employment services** | 11% | 33% | 11% | 44% |

*N=10*

### Open Responses

At the end of the surveys, respondents were prompted with a series of open-ended questions where they could share their thoughts openly on their interactions with MCB, including strengths and opportunities for improvement. Themes are summarized below by question.

**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?**

Eighty-eight respondents answered the first question. However, 30 (34%) responded with blank, NA, none or comments indicating that services did not help.

Of the roughly 50 positive responses, the most frequent mentions for MCB helping respondents get, keep, or find a job were:

“I am on track to completing my Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. I do not believe I would have pursued this goal if it were not for all of the support from my rehabilitation counselor”.

*– Consumer*

* Technology
* Help with training/skill building
* Travel/mobility assistance
* Job search assistance
* Education funding assistance
* Assistance obtaining internship

Broad responses indicate that respondents found a number of different types of support helpful. Notably, technology and travel/mobility assistance are well represented in responses. In other components of the consumer survey, as well as other data collection methods, respondents indicate that these two areas are not provided frequently enough. These open responses may indicate that when delivered, technology and travel/mobility assistance are effective means. Further exploration and data analysis may determine that the service is helpful when provided, but should be offered to a wider group of consumers.

Two respondents noted MCB’s lack of resources to support jobseekers with a higher level of education and experience, such as those with college degrees. On respondent commented “they [MCB] do not have robust enough connections to mainstream employment services to provide any support.” While only two respondents brought up this deficit, the comments may indicate a potentially underserved population. Increased exploration of this area may determine a gap in expertise among VR staff, or an opportunity to increase collaboration with MassHire. This area is further outlined in the recommendations section of this report.

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

When identifying what went well regarding working with MCB, 90 of the 96 responses were positive. The most frequent positive comments mentioned include:

* General positive comments about the agency
* Helpful and supportive counselors
* Providing technology and training
* Assistance with meeting education goals

Respondents also mentioned MCB’s communication; assistance with acquiring employment or internship; assistance with “everything”; and O&M assistance. Comments on what has gone well align with responses on how MCB helped consumers get, keep, or find the right job. Overall, consumers are pleased with MCB’s services, and find diverse elements of the agency to be helpful.

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

Of the 87 respondents, many commented upon difficulties locating and understanding the full universe of services and supports offered by MCB. Alongside these comments, respondents identified a desire for more integration of services offered by other agencies. Once respondent commented “all social services should be more integrated. The right hand never knows what the left is doing so the process fails.” Another respondent noted “Put together all the things you can help with as I’m not even sure some services even existed until this survey.” A third respondent stated, “Let us know what we don’t know.”

“Let us know what we don’t know.”

*– Consumer*

Another prominent theme was a desire for more timely, proactive, and frequent communication from MCB counselors to respondents. Slow or lack of communication and follow-up were reoccurring themes along with the sense that MCB is understaffed. Respondents also mentioned a desire for regularly scheduled check-ins with counselors, either in-person, by phone, or virtually.

Lastly, several respondents listed transitions as problematic. Respondents felt they lacked sufficient guidance and information from MCB during these times. For example, from counselor to counselor and graduation/leaving school.

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

Forty-six respondents answered this question. Approximately 20 respondents replied with enthusiastic gratitude for MCB’s help. “I truly appreciate the benefits because it has allowed me to regain my independence.” “THANK YOU for everything you do to help. You are a Life Line.” and “Without the services I would not be sitting here today in my own place with a BS in pure mathematics.” are just a few of the many grateful survey responses.

Remaining comments touch upon many of the themes highlighted in earlier questions. For example, respondents wished for better communication, shortening length of counselor response time and service delivery. Additionally, respondents wished for better coordination with other agencies, and ability to pay for flexible transportation options such as Uber and Lyft. New themes included enhanced services to support individuals who are employed and living independently, and more assistance for those who have recently become unemployed or are under-employed.

### Businesses

PCG also reached out to businesses that work with MCB and employ individuals engaged in vocational rehabilitation. A survey was distributed to 30 business partners. A total of eight partners responded fully or partially to the survey. This was determined to be too low for inclusion in the Results section. PCG conducted Key Informant Interviews, which are covered in the next section.

## Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

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, and teachers of students with visual impairments who may have received receive Pre-ETS – 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 from these discussions are summarized below.

### Overall Strengths and Barriers

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. 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 mobility and orientation (M&O) skills. Discussion focused on M&O skills from the micro level – navigating a single workplace – to a more macro level such as navigating downtown Boston or using public transportation. M&O 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, 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. 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.

### Transition-aged Youth and Pre-ETS

PCG conducted two specific focus groups geared towards Pre-ETS, one for Pre-ETS participants and one for Pre-ETS providers. Additionally, a focus group conducted with Teachers of students with Visual Impairments (TVI) provided valuable within the Pre-ETS review.

#### Pre-ETS Participants

The focus group with participants and/or family members provided insight to a variety of topics. The participants explained a *unanimous preference for post-secondary training into specialized fields such as science or music to further career opportunities*. They also provided insight into experiences with Curveball software. One participant noted some issues with skipped pages and difficulty reading school documents, textbooks, or articles. Other participants expressed that Curveball worked well for their purposes and had no issues of note. One of the themes of this conversation was that the participants were all fairly new to Pre-ETS. This newness combined with the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to cause disruption in services, and participants indicated that they were having a difficult time getting started into a solid program.

#### Pre-ETS Providers

Participants of the provider focus group represented a diverse group of providers who had varying program formats, representing the diversity of Pre-ETS across the state. When discussing barriers to services, *transportation was the overwhelming choice of a consistent and frustrating barrier*. Several providers spoke to the fact that *to build a sizeable cohort of individuals for programs, they needed to cast a wide net geographically to fill spots with age and interest appropriate participants*. This second point on building efficient cohorts of participants in programs also represented a barrier. Finding enough individuals with similar interest in the varying programs as well as within the same general age range was difficult. Other barriers of note that were discussed were the *difficulties in managing program transitions and the lack of an effective recruiting mechanism*. Awareness of programs seemed light in other research and providers claim awareness and access to families was difficult. To be considerate of participants’ time, PCG was unable to get to the additional focus group questions.

#### Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI)

TVI participants gave significant insight into the student-teacher conduit of information. One notable finding was that *individuals with multiple disabilities were less likely to enter the job market and would more than likely participate in community programming post-graduation*. Participants pointed to recent rule changes that have expanded eligibility to more of their students. While this new eligibility is viewed positively, *the utilization of services is still not widely adopted due to a lack of information on MCB services*. Participants were also asked how their students learned about MCB services and many expressed that they themselves were the best conduit of information to both students and their families.

Teachers felt that employment experience during school was critical to participation in employment after school. Even more, participants communicated that *individuals with multiple disabilities were less likely to enter the job market and more likely to participate in community programming post-graduation*. In general, participants repeatedly spoke about the need to provide youth with disabilities the early job experience that many other youths have access to. Early job experience was particularly important in helping youth learn the skills necessary to navigate the world, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Early job experience was a way to help youth build skills and adaptations to being integrated into the sighted world, as well as building a resume. This gap in job experience grows as youth age and lacking early job experience could make finding a job later in life increasingly more difficult.

When discussing significant barriers, two trends emerged. The *lack of independent or public transportation was cited as a significant barrier both for access to services before and during transition phases*. Secondly, some TVI focus group participants expressed that some individuals were enabled into dependence. Students lacked community and social interaction and experiences, which created a barrier to fostering independent living skills. Participants were also asked how their students learned about MCB services and many expressed that they themselves were the best conduit of information to both students and their families.

### Coordination with Partners

Interviews with MCB partners reflected a wide variety of views but tended to strongly represent MCB’s good working relationship with partners and a sterling reputation for competency, effectiveness, and being easy to work with. The following sections outline results of interviews with key stakeholders.

#### Advocacy Groups

PCG interviewed two individuals from self-advocacy groups. The first individual interviewed stated that her agency holds support group meetings and brings in speakers on a regular basis. They encourage the participants to discuss barriers that they are experiencing. Her current group included two employed participants. MCB supported one of these participants to maintain their job by learning Zoom. The interviewee stated that MCB lent support and helped provide equipment to the group participants. Information about MCB is distributed during groups, and the agency meets with MCB once a month. The second individual interviewed said that MCB: “We have regular meetings, at least monthly. I am also on a board for the commission and so I also have monthly meetings. At the federation, we have stakeholder meetings every 6 months.”

#### Workforce Development

PCG interviewed the Massachusetts State Workforce Board (MassHire) and the Massachusetts Division of Apprenticeship Standards. The interviewee shared that the MOU triggered more substantive relationships between MCB and MassHire. It initiated VR counselors meeting directly with MassHire career counselors to coordinate services on an individual basis.A key focus of the interview was to better understand how MCB could expand offering apprenticeships to VR consumers and businesses in Massachusetts. PCG made recommendations that emphasize MCB’s opportunity to lead the development of a coordinated policy framework to serve MCB VR Consumers in non-traditional and alternative work arrangements.

#### Education

PCG interviewed education partners to learn about coordination between MCB and DESE. Interviewed partners identified both strengths and areas for growth. One partner believed that MCB sometimes faces difficulty coordinating services with schools and navigating their relationships. This is echoed by another respondent who believed that MCB staff are largely not present as a resource for rural schools. This respondent commented that frequently, weeks or months go by between conversations with the MCB staff assigned to the schools they work in. Both individuals suggested that, when working with youth, MCB attempt to cultivate a closer relationship with parents who are looking to support their child as parents are often more successful advocates within educational settings than other state agents. Both individuals were also quick to praise MCB’s services and performance broadly.

*“I work with some great people at state agencies, I think MCB is right up with the best of them on this..”*

*– DESE Employee*

# Analysis

PCG conducted analysis on the quantitative and qualitative results described above to meet the requirements of the CSNA process. Specifically, analysis describes the population MCB serves and outcomes of services, especially for targeted populations. Following this analysis, provider capacity and vocational rehabilitation capacity are analyzed. Finally, PCG provides analysis on coordination with stakeholders. All of the analysis is combined to determine service gaps.

## Population Statistics and Demographics

With the unemployment rate for individuals with visual impairments almost double that of people without disabilities (7.8% vs. 4.3%), there may be room for MCB to assist more people. We will also learn if any populations are underserved. Underserved means they received services, but not enough. To learn more about this, we analyze the population that is served to learn who may not be receiving services.

### Geography

Analysis of demographic data reveals several trends in service delivery. Almost two thirds (66%) of all current MCB participants live in and around Boston. This concentration is greater than expected when compared to estimated population distributions. Additionally, individuals in rural areas are underrepresented compared to estimated population distributions. The differences in geographic density may indicate limited access to services in rural areas when compared to urban areas. Alternatively, people with visual impairments may choose to live in urban areas where there is traditionally greater access to services, resources, and transportation compared to rural areas.

### Age

MCB serves a higher percentage of youth (ages 14-21) compared to what is expected based on population distributions (24.4% vs. 4.5%). At the same time, people who are 65 and older are underrepresented in VR services (7% vs. 48%). Variance may reflect trends in the labor market. Adults 65 and older may be entering retirement or the end of their career. They may be less likely to be seek new employment or supports. Youth who seek employment for the first time may be more likely to ask or need support. The difference may also relate to expectations and services under WIOA. Finally, younger people are more likely to live in urban areas. With a higher representation of MCB consumers in the Boston area, these data align.

When considering the rates of successful case closure, there is a difference in success rates when comparing young adults and older adults. This difference may result from RSA’s definition of a successful case closure. While few individuals under 21 closed successfully through the current definition, life circumstances for younger individuals may preclude them from this definition of success. This same definition could also lead to a higher rate of youth being ineligible compared to older consumers.

### Race and Ethnicity

Overall, the distribution of race and ethnicity in MCB’s open cases follow expected distributions. However, individuals who are Black or African American are represented at a rate10% higher than expected from population estimates. Individuals who are Hispanic are also represented 10% higher than expected. Conversely, the rate of people who are White is 11% lower than expected. These results parallel the higher rates of individuals in urban areas and youth served.

### Primary and Secondary Disabilities

As expected, almost all people that MCB serve have a primary disability of blindness (95%). The second largest group of primary disability is deaf-blindness (2%). About half of cases do not list a secondary disability. The largest category of secondary disability is Blindness (26.5% of open cases). Mobility, dexterity, and other physical impairments represent 10% of secondary disability of open cases. About 7% of MCB’s cases have cognitive and other mental impairments. While blindness is a primary need, counselors and providers must have the resources and training to serve diverse needs that come with secondary disabilities to support quality employment outcomes.

### Significance of Disability

Analysis of significance of disability reveals that most significant disability cases represent 25.6% of all open cases. Cases with ‘significant disability’ comprise the rest of the cases that have a classification. There are a small number of cases that have no classification. When reviewing data from the RSA 911 to determine trends, it is evident that the number and rate of most significant disability cases has increased by approximately 15% over the last three years. Paired with further analysis in this report, this notable increase indicates that MCB is working to ensure quality outcomes for this target population.

### Barriers

Barriers to employment come from many facets of life for MCB consumers. **Across all consumers responding to the survey, transportation was the greatest reported barrier (60%).** Stakeholders echo this sentiment. Pre-ETS providers, teachers of students with visual impairments, CRPs, and community partners all reported transportation as a hampering barrier. Housing also proved to be a significant issue, with nearly 1 in 4 respondents reporting housing issues. Additionally, respondents reported that financial barriers are present. Specifically, the most frequently reported financial barriers were resources for people with disabilities (34%) and the potential loss of benefits (28%). At high rates, respondents indicated that they experienced job-related barriers. The category most identified by respondents was **employer attitudes toward people with disabilities** (45%). Next, 34% of respondents indicated a poor job market or a lack of opportunity. Limited work experience and a lack of opportunities to explore careers were selected at the same frequency by respondents (25%).

Through the survey, members of minority groups reported more barriers compared to their peers who are not minorities. **Members of a minority group experienced barriers at a higher level than non-minorities across four categories: housing, food, clothing, childcare, and other basic needs**. Additionally, members of a minority group were almost twice as likely to report limited financial resources as a barrier (37% vs 20%) compared to their peers. **Members of a minority group were almost twice as likely as their non-minority peers to indicate that they had a lack of opportunities to explore careers**. Unfortunately, these disparities align with trends nationwide for individuals with minority groups, regardless of disability. Given analysis of geographic representation, this disparity may also relate to a greater number of individuals living in the Boston area, where the cost of living is higher compared to other parts of Massachusetts.

Further analysis and recommendations address a number of these barriers, especially for members of minority groups. Although VR services may not address all identified barriers, they do impact an individual’s ability to find and keep employment. MCB’s services and coordination and collaboration with partners may address a number of these critical areas.

### Outcomes

Almost 60% of MCB consumers experience a successful case closure. PCG’s Case Closures report identifies statistically proven factors that protect or pose a risk to successful case closure. Many other factors were analyzed and identified, but the following tables identify those factors that were statistically significant. Table 48 identifies factors that protect or increase the likelihood of a successful case closure. Having resources and completing 6th and 8th grade increase the likelihood of a successful case closure. Table 49 identifies risk factors that decrease the likelihood of a successful case closure. Starting but not completing education is a risk factor. Additionally, long term unemployment, having a low income, or having a case labeled as significant disability were factors that decreased the likelihood of success. Since the majority of cases MCB serves are classified as having a significant disability, conclusions may be limited. Further exploration on why education is not completed, or if there were gaps in supports and services that could have helped a person finish school, may be important things to learn.

Table : Protective Factors

|  |
| --- |
| **Significant Protective Factors** |
| Primary Support at Application: Personal Income |
| Highest Grade Completed: 8th |
| Highest Grade Completed: 6th |
| General Assistance at Application |
| Affordable Care Act Exchange at Application |

Table : Risk Factors

| **Significant Risk Factors** |
| --- |
| Highest Education: None completed |
| Long Term Unemployed |
| Highest Education: Some college, no certificate or degree |
| Significance of Disability: Significant |
| Highest Education: Secondary school equivalency |
| Low Income |

### Job Placements

Analysis indicates that, from 2017-2019, consumers most commonly obtained employment in customer service, teaching, and retail sales. This data aligns with national data on major categories of adults with a visual impairment, presented in Table 50.

Table : Major Job categories of Employed, Civilian US Adults by Presence of a Visual Disability

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|   | Individuals with a Visual Disability | Individuals without a Visual Disability |
| Management, business, and financial occupations | 13.9% | 16.6% |
| Professional and related occupations | 17.5% | 23.4% |
| Service occupations | 20.7% | 17.5% |
| Sales and related occupations | 11.5% | 10.0% |
| Office and administrative support occupations | 12.3% | 11.3% |
| Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations | 0.3% | 0.8% |
| Construction and extraction occupations | 6.5% | 5.3% |
| Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations | 2.6% | 2.9% |
| Production occupations | 7.7% | 5.5% |
| Transportation and material moving occupations | 7.0% | 6.5% |

When considering the long-term impacts of COVID-19, it may be important to consider how job placements for MCB consumers might change. Table 3, Most Common Job Titles of MCB VR Exiting Cases, illustrates projections in the next 10 years, with adjustments related to COVID-19. Forecasts include a 5% decrease in customer service representatives, but greater increases in teachers, retail sales persons, and social worker positions. These forecasts align with the most commonly required duties for major occupation categories, as identified in PCG’s Analysis of Essential Job Duties. Analysis of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics identified the most commonly required duties to include interpersonal skills, talking with others, working as part of a team, and communicating effectively. These were followed by basic computer skills (does not include advanced computer skills or coding) and paperwork, administration, and general office tasks like filing or documenting events. Jobs are also likely to call for soft skills like conflict resolution, emotional labor tasks, and written communication skills.

Related to long-term impacts of COVID-19 and identified barriers to effective transportation, the location of employment may also be considered in relation to job placements. Currently, nearly half of the workforce is estimated to be working from home.[[7]](#footnote-8) Many individuals report a reduced bias from employers in traditional work environments because they are not in a traditional office environment or interview process. In fact, many in the disability community report higher job satisfaction and earnings than their traditionally-employed peers.

Finally, consideration should be given for the earnings and career projections in these fields. In the following analysis of wages, individuals are infrequently high wage earners. Analysis and consideration for the future development and support of job seekers who are blind and visually impaired, individuals, families, and state agencies may consider preparing and considering career paths as they would for individuals without visual impairments. Developing lucrative skills that support higher wages and a mobile career path may be considered during school, counseling, and guidance.

### Wages

Analysis of average hourly wages of MCB participants indicate that while wages are relatively high, annual average income is limited by the number of hours worked. MCB participants who successfully closed between 2017 to 2019 earned an average hourly wage of $20.30. These new employees reported working an average of 30.2 hours each week. These average wages and hours equate to an average annual income of $31,879, assuming a fifty-two-week work year. Of course, as an average, wages reflect a variety of employment outcomes, wages, and hours. A living wage for a single adult in Massachusetts translates to an annual income of $32,147[[8]](#footnote-9) before taxes. On average, MCB participants earn annual income slightly below the living wage for an individual living by themselves. There are several factors that may impact this analysis.

* **Supplemental resources:** Individuals who are blind may receive supplementary benefits that enhance financial resources. If an individual wishes to maintain Social Security disability benefits, they must earn $2,110 or lower per month, without the consideration of other incentives. This consideration may limit the number of hours an individual is willing to work.
* **Impact of disability:** An individual’s disability may limit the number of hours they are able to work.
* **Life circumstances:** Who a person supports impacts a living wage. A living wage is higher if an individual supports other people in his or her home.
* **Geography:** Where a person lives impacts the cost of living. For example, the cost of living in the Boston area is higher than in other areas. As almost two thirds of open cases currently reside in this area, the actual living wage may be greater for the majority of MCB participants.

Additional information and analysis may shed light into potential earnings and financial security of MCB participants. Learning more about financial security and circumstances on an individual basis may also provide insight into the role VR services can play in improving outcomes for individuals. This understanding may inform vocational guidance and counseling, benefits counseling, employment goals, and training efforts.

## Populations of Importance

The following sections provide analysis on populations of importance, as defined by the CSNA process.

### Individuals with a Most Significant Disability

Analysis indicates MCB’s coordination and services effectively support individuals with a most significant disability. Almost 25% of open cases received a disability determination of most significantly disabled. Both the rate and the number of individuals with most significant disabilities has grown considerably in recent years. This increase may be related to MCB’s coordination and collaboration under WIOA with other agencies to facilitate extended and ongoing supported employment. In 2016, MCB also received clarification from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission that clarified that MCB consumers who have been rehabilitated into competitive integrated supported employment will be eligible to receive funding for on-going supports under its state-funded Extended Ongoing Supports Program. This coordination and resource availability may have increased interest and perceived feasibility of employment for individuals with most significant disabilities.

### Outcomes

Not only has MCB increased the percent and number of consumers with MSD served in recent years, the outcomes are more positive compared to those with significant disabilities. Individuals with a most significant disability have higher rates of successful case closure, and subsequently lower rates of unsuccessful closure compared to their peers with a significant disability. On average, individuals with a most significant disability earn nearly a dollar more ($23.21 vs. $22.15) and work an average of one more hour per week (31.3 hours vs. 30.1 hours). **In conclusion, individuals with most significant disabilities receive, on average, work more and are paid more than their peers who are less significantly impacted by their disability.** This notable finding may indicate that individuals with a most significant disability receive the accurate and adequate services that address the impact of their disability and facilitate employment. While wages and hours could increase, individuals with a most significant disabilities are not at a disadvantage compared to their peers with significant disabilities.

### Individuals with Visual Impairments who are Minorities, and those who are unserved or underserved

Data presented demonstrates that racial and ethnic minorities are represented as MCB participants at rates comparable to or higher than Massachusetts population estimates. This data may indicate that MCB has effective mechanisms of reaching and engaging with individuals who are minorities.

#### Consumer Experience

**Comparing the feedback of open cases and all cases reveals differences in perspective on the consumer’s experience.** Across all cases, survey responses indicate that individuals who are minorities have a relatively positive service experience. Across accommodations, technology and equipment, times, and needed testing and assessment, individuals who are minorities are more likely to be positive about their service experience compared to their peers who are not a minority. However, individuals who are minorities are less likely to indicate that services are in a convenient place for them or that they can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services. Respondents report overall positive counselor interaction.

While the analysis of all cases leads to positive trends, analysis of open cases reveals different trends. Instead of an overall positive service experience compared to individuals who are not minorities, respondents report a less positive experience in 7 of 8 surveyed areas. It should be noted that respondents were still overall positive in many areas, such as receiving services in a convenient place (87% agreed). Here we point to a difference in data when comparing all cases vs. open cases. Open cases were less likely to report positive experiences in a variety of interactions with their counselors. On only one of seven questions about experience with a VR counselor. When responding to ‘My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment.’ individuals who are minorities are more likely to report a positive experience than non-minority open cases. On average across counselor experience questions, members of minority groups with open cases were 8-percentage points less likely to agree to positive statements. Most notably, the few members of a minority groups with open cases agree that counselors helped consumers understand the sorts of careers they could pursue (48.0%). The difference in reported perspectives over time may be related to differences in service delivery, perspective, sample size, or recall. Additional information and exploration are recommended in subsequent sections of this report.

**Members of minority groups report gaps in CRP capacity at a higher rate than their peers who are not minorities**. Twice as many members of a minority group thought that it took a long time to get a job (44% vs. 18%), and three times as many individuals who are minorities indicated that CRP’s did not have enough staff (33% vs. 9%). While there were no respondents of ‘non-minority consumers’ who indicated a lack of providers for a specific population, 11.1% of individuals who are minorities did agree that there were not enough providers for a specific population. Twice as many individuals who are minorities also felt that the staff of CRPs lacked the skills needed to support different kinds of needs. These reported deficits in consumer experience with CRP’s merits further exploration and subsequent action.

#### Barriers

Members of minority groups experience barriers at a higher level than individuals who are not minorities across housing, food, clothing, and childcare. Individuals who are minorities report slightly higher rates of immigration status and discrimination case status barriers, but lower rates of criminal offenses or other legal barriers. Benefits Counseling is another significant barrier among individuals who are minorities compared to their peers. Individuals who are minorities report a lack of opportunities to explore careers was a barrier at a much greater rate than their peers (37.1 vs. 20%). Data indicates that individuals who are minorities experience greater barriers, similar to members of minority groups who do not have visual impairments.

#### Outcomes

Barriers reported at higher rates by individuals who are minorities may impact their likelihood to become employed through the MCB program. Individuals who are identified as Hispanic are notably less likely to have their case closed as a successful, competitive, integrated employment outcome. Individuals who identified as white are more likely to close their case successfully than almost every other race category. The exception is individuals who identified as Native American, who represent a small number of cases.

On average, individuals who are racial and ethnic minorities work more hours at lower wages than other MCB VR closures. When combined with survey responses from members of a minority group lack opportunities to explore careers, analysis may indicate that members of minority groups may not receive the same opportunities or services as their non-minority peers. **Disparities in case closure rates, lower wages, and reported lack of opportunities, may indicate that this population is underserved.**

#### Others Who May Be Unserved or Underserved

**Individuals with advanced education or diverse employment goals:** From analysis conducted on available data, individuals with advanced education, or diverse employment goals, may be underserved. In open responses, several MCB participants commented that they felt MCB was not as effective at supporting individuals with advanced education. This may relate to the low utilization rate of One Stop Centers reported in the consumer data as well. Further exploration and analysis would be needed to learn more about service delivery and outcomes of consumers with higher levels of education attainment.

**Individuals who live in rural areas:** Analysis of case management data indicates that individuals with visual impairments are represented at a lower rate than would be expected based on population estimates. Focus groups and open-ended survey and interview responses both suggest that individuals in more rural portions of the state can feel neglected by MCB services and perceive a lack of opportunity to engage in the full range of MCB services and experiences. Additionally, with 60% of survey respondents indicated that transportation was a barrier toward employment, it makes sense that individuals who live in rural areas would also experience these challenges. **The analysis of case management data in conjunction with data collected over the CSNA process may indicate that individuals who live in rural areas may be underserved.**

### Youth (Age 14-21) with Visual Impairments

MCB serves a higher percentage of youth ages 14-21 compared to expected population distribution (24.4% vs. 4.5%). In fact, youth comprise the largest percent of MCB’s open cases. The demographics of youth MCB serve mirror expectations set in Massachusetts demographics.

#### Strengths

Survey results highlight several strengths throughout MCB’s programs for youth with visual impairments. Youth report positive experiences with VR counselors with little disagreement. Similarly, respondents receive services positively. Except for the Department of Education (k-12), youth report that MCB effectively coordinates services with its partners, particularly the Carroll Center for the Blind and post-secondary schools. Finally, youth report that VR counselors show tremendous cultural, background, and identity respect.

#### Areas for Growth

While youth comprise a large percentage of MCB’s open cases, and these youth report positive service delivery is positive services, there are opportunities for improvement.

The survey responses and focus groups identify barriers to accessing services. Respondents share that transportation is a consistent barrier to services and successful outcomes. Providers report students spread over a large geography prohibits serving more students. Students identify transportation as the most common barrier. Teachers of students with visual impairments and providers also identify transportation as a primary barrier to both service delivery and employment opportunities. Potentially related to the transportation, teachers also share that some students lacked community and social interaction and experiences, creating a barrier to fostering independent living skills.

Students also report they experience job-related barriers. While no single barrier was overwhelmingly selected, its notable that a majority who experience barriers in this category show multiple individual barriers. Over a third of students responding selected three or more barriers. Job-related barriers include:

* Employer attitudes towards people with disabilities
* Poor job market or a lack of opportunities
* Limited relevant job experience
* Lack of opportunities to explore careers

While many youths 14-21 lack job experience, overcoming these barriers are critical to becoming employed as an adult. The provision of Pre-ETS can reduce barriers in all these areas.

#### Access and Delivery

Another potential area of growth is expansion of services to additional eligible and potentially eligible students. Anywhere from 20-40% of youth respondents indicated that they are not receiving Pre-ETS, but need these services. General trends show that individuals would typically mark more than one service was needed, while those receiving services typically marked so across all categories. This indicates there are gaps in Pre-ETS availability, rather than individual components not being offered.

Both teachers and Pre-ETS providers corroborate challenges with access and delivery. Teachers of students with visual impairments indicated that a lack of information on MCB services limited participation, and utilization of services is still not widely adopted. During the focus group of Pre-ETS providers, participants indicated that there were ***difficulties in managing program transitions and the lack of an effective recruiting mechanism***. Moreover, communication and coordination with families may be limiting which potential students access Pre-ETS.

Access and delivery of Pre-ETS may also be impacted with the current structure of service delivery. Several Pre-ETS providers shared that ***building a sizeable cohort of individuals for programs required casting a wide geographic net to fill spots with age and interest appropriate participants***. Finding enough individuals with similar interest in the varying programs, within the same age range, was difficult. Additionally, a minority of students indicated that they received Pre-ETS in the community. Over ½ of respondents indicated they received these services in a classroom, and approximately 30% indicated that they received Pre-ETS in a facility that supports people with disabilities. Considering other structures and mechanisms for service delivery may increase access and availability to a wider number of students.

Considering who is targeted for Pre-ETS may be another consideration for increasing access and delivery. Teachers of students with visual impairments indicated that ***individuals with multiple disabilities were less likely to enter the job market and would more than likely participate in community programming post-graduation***. When examining methods and content around communication, access, and delivery, it may be important to consider which students and families are considering Pre-ETS and employment. Additional education around employment for *all* students with visual impairments, and participation in Pre-ETS, may impact the trajectory and outcomes of students with multiple disabilities. Potentially, this may increase participation and employment outcomes of individuals with most significant disabilities.

#### Outcomes

Individuals with visual disabilities are less likely to participate in the labor force and have higher rates of unemployment compared to their peers without disabilities. Youth with visual impairments experience the same trends in comparison to their peers. Given these trends parallel one another, trajectory for successful employment may be determined early in a person’s life. Researchers tell us that one of the greatest predictors of employment after high school for individuals with disabilities is employment experience during high school[[9]](#footnote-10). Prioritizing employment and increasing access and opportunities through Pre-ETS could play a pivotal role in changing the trajectory of youth transitioning out of the school system. Aligning with RSA priorities, and research, these results point to the critical nature of examining and expanding service delivery to improve outcomes.

## Provider Capacity

The CSNA process requires the evaluation of Community Rehabilitation Providers. PCG also provides analysis of Pre-ETS providers, who serve another critical population. The analysis for both types of providers can be found below.

### Community Rehabilitation Providers

The RSA requires that the CSNA includes an assessment of Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP). Specifically, assessment must include determining if there is a need for further establishment, development, or improvement of these organizations. In the consumer survey, respondents were asked about several potential gaps that relate to Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) capacity. Overall, 36.5% of consumer survey respondents indicated there were no service gaps.

Survey results indicated several gaps that may be addressed through further establishment, development, or improvement of CRPs. When examining all cases, 27.3% of respondents indicated that it took a long time to get a job. Of similar note, 22.7% of all cases indicated that there were not enough staff. When community partners were asked about employment supports in their community, few partners indicated that employment supports were ‘always adequate’, while most respondents indicated that employment supports were ‘sometimes adequate’.

Members of a minority group report a greater gap in all CRP services compared to those who are not minorities. Members of a minority group reported that it took a long time to get a job at a rate over twice that of respondents who are not minorities. (44% vs. 18%). Additionally, members of a minority group responded at a rate three times higher that CRP’s did not have enough staff (33% vs. 9%). While no ‘non-minority consumer’ respondents indicated a lack of providers for a specific population, 11.1% of individuals who are minorities reported insufficient providers for a specific population. Individuals who are minorities reported at double the rate that staff of CRPs lacked the skills needed to support different kinds of needs.

Differences in reporting on gaps may come from several different places. First, it was established that individuals who are minorities are more likely to live in urban areas compared to their peers who do not identify as a minority. One explanation of the difference responses may be geographic: capacity may be related to CRP capacity in urban areas. Second, the sample size is relatively small. Further exploration may determine if these responses have a common geographic area or provider. It is also possible that individuals who are minorities are served by providers who are understaffed or not prepared to support the population effectively.

### Pre-ETS Providers

#### Strengths

Data collection efforts indicate that Pre-ETS delivered by partners is strong. Pre-ETS participants responding through the survey indicated that they received the expanse of required Pre-ETS services. This indicates that those students who receive Pre-ETS receive the majority of services. Respondents in both surveys and qualitative data collection measures indicate that collaboration between providers and MCB is positive and effective. This relationship occurs outside of traditional Pre-ETS, and extends to a number of collaborative efforts outlined in the introduction to this assessment. Such collaboration may also increase the quality and efficacy of services provided directly to students.

#### Areas for growth

While results indicate strong delivery of services to program participants, there may be opportunities to improve coordination, communication, and reach of services. Through focus groups, both teachers and providers corroborate challenges with access and delivery of Pre-ETS. Teachers report that a lack of information on MCB services limited participation. Subsequently, services are not widely adopted. Teachers also share that students with multiple disabilities are more likely to pursue other activities besides employment after high school. Additional exploration and evaluation of information about employment may increase interest and reach to a greater number of students. During the provider focus group, participants indicated that there were difficulties in managing program transitions and a lack of an effective recruiting mechanism. Moreover, communication and coordination with families may be limiting which potential students access Pre-ETS.

Access and delivery of Pre-ETS may also be impacted with the current structure of service delivery. Several Pre-ETS providers shared that finding enough individuals with similar interest in the varying programs, within the same age range, was difficult. Additionally, over half of youth responding to the participant survey indicated they received services in a classroom, and approximately 30% indicated that they received Pre-ETS in a facility that supports people with disabilities. Considering other structures and mechanisms for service delivery may increase access and availability to a wider number of students.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Capacity and services

According to the 2020-2023 MCB State Plan, MCB employs approximately 60 staff. The 38 staff who provide direct service have an average caseload of 70 VR consumers. MCB anticipates that this level of staffing will be sufficient over the coming years, when projecting the number of individuals served, turnover rate of staff, and other relevant factors. With a 1% turnover rate, MCB retains staff at levels considerably higher than most rehabilitation agencies. Over the next five years, MCB anticipates the need to fill 5-8 positions at the agency. Retention efforts include regular in-service training based on needs assessments conducted by staff. During FY 2019 MCB conducted more than twenty in-service training programs on topics such as: ethics, diversity, crisis intervention, eye diseases, the Expanded Core Curriculum, autism, and work incentives. MCB leadership also maintains regular communication with staff to support ongoing engagement.

Productive recruitment efforts have been made through relationships with graduate rehabilitation programs at Assumption College and Springfield College, as well as other programs in the area. In a given academic year, these programs have approximately 100 undergraduate and 125 graduate students who are enrolled in degree programs related to rehabilitation science.

### Strengths

In the consumer survey’s open responses, respondents expressed their general positivity and appreciation for MCB services and counselors. Open responses also indicated that, when delivered, technology and travel/mobility assistance were helpful services. This theme was carried through the focus groups. Across focus groups, participants noted the importance of technology in being successful in employment. Alongside technology, focus group participants noted that the importance of transportation and training in the success of consumers. Mobility and orientation skills were identified as ‘critical’ to the success, and suggested as a focus during service provision. Particularly of note is MCB achieved high marks (over 80%) for counselors respecting client culture, background, and identity as well as addressing questions and concerns in a timely way.

Community partners who engaged with the survey distributed generally had an extremely high opinion of MCB and the services it offered. While they did provide some comment and areas for suggested focus, the majority of feedback about MCB was highly positive. This group perceived MCB as an active and effective partner, and sees MCB staff as generally highly skilled and interested in consumer success. However, there are a few areas in which community partners see MCB as capable of improving. Keep in mind that the number of community partners involved in this survey was limited.

### Identified Areas for Growth

While the majority of qualitative and quantitative responses gathered are positive, there are several areas that may be examined as areas for potential growth. These areas include:

* Access to MCB Offices
* Communicating a Client Driven Process
* Communication and Coordination
* Supporting Diverse Job Seekers

Each of these areas are outlined and further described below.

#### Access to MCB Offices

A minority of individuals with open cases reported that MCB offices are easy to access and navigate. About half of respondents reported the ability to access MCB offices and services using public transportation. This may be related to a lack of public transit around the location of the MCB office. It points to an area for future advocacy and improvement. Transportation is the most frequently cited barrier to employment across data collection methods. While almost two-thirds of open cases reporting barriers say transportation was a barrier for them, fewer than a third (28.8%) report that they received help with transportation services from MCB. Almost 40% of respondents stated they received these services from an outside provider. This may represent a gap in services that will need to be addressed by MCB. Second, only about two-in-five (38.6%) agree that they can easily get around MCB offices. In focus groups, VR staff and TVIs focused a great deal on the need for orientation and mobility as skills necessary for successful employment. MCB may need to revise the layout or location of offices to improve navigation by consumers, Additionally, MCB may need to refocus services on providing orientation and mobility skills to allow consumers to find methods to navigate unfamiliar places from metro Boston to a new workplace.

#### Communicating a Client-Driven Process

Survey results indicate that only 58.2% of respondents agreed that the counselor informed them of their rights during the VR process. It’s possible that the recall rate is lower as respondents attempt to recall a conversation at the beginning of their employment process. Similarly, 50% of individuals recalled their counselor talking about choices when developing their plan for employment, and only 40% of respondents agreed that their counselor helped them understand the sorts of careers they could pursue. These survey results may indicate a low recall rate amongst consumers who had these conversations some time back. These survey results may also indicate that the client-driven process that individuals participate in is not explained in a way that all participants understand.

However, when pulling out individuals who are participating in Pre-ETS, they strongly agree that their counselor includes them in the development of a rehabilitation plan and informs them of their rights during the VR process. While a smaller population, this trend may be worth examining more closely to determine if there are successful practices being used with youth that might be applied to the general MCB VR process.

#### Coordination and Communication

Open responses to consumer survey questions indicate coordination and communication could improve. Respondents indicated that communication was slower than they preferred, and they didn’t know about the array of services offered by MCB. In particular, transitions were a challenging time when enhanced communication and coordination may have been beneficial.

Additionally, Pre-ETS providers identify limitations in communication and coordination, especially around transitions. These providers, alongside teachers, indicate that challenges in communication and coordination also lead to less students knowing about and participating in Pre-ETS. This challenge may also relate to the limited participation of VR consumers and One Stop services. Examination of policy and practice of setting expectations with consumers and coordination and communication may provide additional insight into this area.

#### Supporting Diverse Job Seekers

Across analysis, research results indicate that MCB’s services are positive for the majority of consumers. However, job seekers who are members of minority groups reported less positive experiences. Analysis reveal that members of minority groups are less likely to report positive experiences in a variety of interactions with their counselors. Members of minority groups are also less likely to have a successful case closure, and have lower average wages compared to their peers who are not minorities. There are other ways we can consider diversity in participants as well. In response to open consumer survey questions, two respondents noted MCB’s lack of resources to support jobseekers with a higher level of education and experience, such as those with college degrees. Increased exploration of this area may determine a gap in expertise among VR staff, or an opportunity to increase collaboration with MassHire. This area is further outlined in the recommendations section of this report. Further examination into training, policy, and practice, may identify opportunities to improve services and outcomes for all consumers.

## Coordination with Stakeholders

MCB’s services are strengthened by partnership and collaboration with public and private partnerships. As outlined in the introduction and collaboration section, MCB works hand in hand with ESE and MassHire to coordinate services and funding, and educate partners to have the appropriate skills to effectively serve blind job seekers.

Additionally, interagency cooperation strengthens opportunities and services for individuals with visual impairments. Approximately 33% of individuals registered as legally blind in Massachusetts benefit from MassHealth. MassHealth services have key comparable benefits that have enabled many VR consumers to reach their vocational goals. MCB’s state- funded Deaf Blind Extended Supports (DBES) program also works closely with MassHealth to provide services under the Home and Community-Based waiver that can provide the underpinning of vocational outcomes in some cases. MCB’s counselors work closely with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to facilitate the development and completion of plans and services for persons with intellectual disabilities who may need DDS and VR services. In 2016 MCB and DDS matched data to identify all consumers who are potentially dually eligible, identifying approximately 1,800 consumers. Upon further review, DDS estimated that 400 of these consumers might be appropriate candidates to receive VR services.

In addition to interagency collaboration, MCB has recently developed enhanced public-private collaborations. Organizations include Perkins, the Carroll Center, and Massachusetts Association for the Blind (MAB) Community Services. MCB has also collaborated with the Perkins Business Partnership (PBP), an initiative helping MCB job-ready consumers optimize their resumes and to obtain job interviews. Perkins Business Partnership meetings involve MCB job-ready candidates breaking into small groups with PBP members to review resumes, evaluate and brainstorm job search strategies and identify mentors. These types of collaborations speak to MCB’s commitment to improving opportunities and outcomes for all individuals with visual impairments.

To support enhanced relationships with businesses, MCB collaborates in different initiatives that educate employers and aim to connect them with qualified job seekers, as outlined in the 2020-2023 state plan. MCB obtained and completed a grant from the Job-Driven Technical Assistance Center at the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) to enhance the collaboration among MCB, the Carroll Center, and the Perkins Business Partnership to more effectively meet the job placement needs of both consumers and employers. As part of the project, MCB operationalized a VisionWorks Consortium which consists of MCB, the Carroll Center for the Blind, and the Perkins School for the Blind. The three organizations that are a part of the consortium pooled their employer contacts to track the business partner engagement to increase employment opportunities for job seekers who are visually impaired. Perkins School for the Blind, MCB, the Carroll Center, the National Braille Press, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study usually hold a job fair each October. This year the partners held an employer education event instead. The event included approximately seventy employers who were asked to interview, mentor, provide an internship opportunity to, hire, or promote at least one blind consumer (or one more than during 2019) during the year as part of a “2020 Challenge” initiative. Many of the employer’s present expressed their commitment to this initiative. MCB also commissioned the development of a guide for Massachusetts business employers on tax incentives available for hiring individuals with disabilities.

As expected, some key partnerships stand out with others very rarely utilized. Close of half of all respondents were working with the Carroll Center for the Blind. MassHealth also proved to be a significant partner for many with 36% of respondents selecting them. Other key partners were post-secondary schools and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. Overall, MCB’s coordination with partners was rated at 3.4, which is rated as good coordination (1 out of 4 scale).

Community partners who engaged with the survey distributed generally had an extremely high opinion of MCB and the services it offered. While they did provide some comment and areas for suggested focus, most of the feedback about MCB was highly positive. This group perceived MCB as an active and effective partner and sees MCB staff as generally highly skilled and interested in consumer success. Likewise, a high proportion of community partners responding to the survey said they were unsure of the adequacy of community supports in their community. While this is better than partners disagreeing, it suggests that partners may not be fully aware of the full scope of MCB services. This would suggest that they may not be able to guide consumers toward the services they need to be most successful.

### Coodination of Services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Section 5.5.1 outlines the needs of Individuals with disabilities for transition services and preemployment transition services.Analysis indicates that needs for this population include an expansion of Pre-ETS availability geographically, increased community-based opportunities, and exploration of alternative methods and approaches. Quantitative and quantitative data indicate that expanded coordination and communication between MCB staff, providers, and ESE staff may be needed to serve transition-aged youth more effectively.

MCB’s State Plan outlines activities conducted by MCB and ESE to coordinate transition services provided under IDEA to meet the needs of transition-aged youth. MCB and educational personnel conduct transition planning identification and outreach to facilitate the development and completion of students’ individualized education programs through the Chapter 688 process. MCB, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs (the state Parent Training and Information Center), has developed an information packet for the parents of children with visual impairments on the pre-employment transition services and transition services offered by the MCB vocational rehabilitation program. For students eligible for MCB service and who are discussing transition, the school district, the student or the student's guardian may invite MCB to participate as a member of the IEP Team. MCB may recommend transition services and goals consistent with the IPE for the student. MCB will provide information, as requested, to school districts about school and community-based vocational training and integrated employment (including supported employment) training for transition-aged eligible students available through MCB regional offices. MCB will designate staff in regional offices to provide technical support to school districts on legal blindness, independent living skills development, the Expanded Core Curriculum for legally blind students as it relates to the General Curriculum, and transition services, including preemployment transition services.

While structure and policy may be in place for effective coordination, there may be areas for improvement when it comes to practice. During a focus group, Pre-ETS providers shared that in their experience, limits in communication and coordination limited the number of students who participated in Pre-ETS. In a focus group with teachers of students with visual impairments, teachers noted that there was a lack of information on MCB that limited use of services. When asked about effective means to communication, respondents noted that they themselves were the best conduit of information to both students and families. These teachers also shared that students with multiple disabilities were more likely to pursue alternatives to employment after graduation. Such trends may indicate a lack of knowledge of employment opportunities and supports available to students.

### Coordination with Workforce Development

In 2016, MCB and MassHire entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) alongside other agencies in an effort to share costs as required through WIOA. This MOU helped to establish relationships and practices that support coordination of services and funding. These relationships and work are extended through the 2020-2023 state plan. MCB and MassHire are taking steps to increase access and collaboration to use resources efficiently and effectively to best support job seekers, including those who are blind.

Over the last several years, coordination between MCB and MassHire appears to have increased. A MassHire Executive official shared that the MOU triggered more substantive relationships between MCB and MassHire. It initiated VR counselors meeting directly with MassHire career counselors to coordinate services on an individual basis. On a State level, MCB and MassHire recently participated in the State Plan Advisory Committee. This committee met every other week to build the state plan to improve coordination and collaboration between agencies. Additionally, MassHire sits on the Blind Rehabilitation Council as required by statute. Current practices and relationship development have scaffolded opportunities for further collaboration and practices.

While administrative coordination has occurred, survey results indicate that there are gaps in implementation on the ground. Of open cases responding to the survey, 3.7% of respondents indicated they had received services from a One-Stop Career Center. This low utilization rate reported may have several causes. As with other data points, recall or knowledge of where the consumer received specific services may not be accurate if the service was delivered some time ago. Alternatively, consumers may not use the MassHire referral because they feel they are adequately served by MCB. Other reasons for the low utilization rate may be related to the complexity of accessing services from another agency, or experienced barriers with accessibility. While there are policies and training in place to support coordination and collaboration, data indicates the impact on job seekers who are blind has been limited.

# Identification of Service Gaps

Potential service gaps below are outlined based on results and analysis contained in this assessment. It should be noted that identification of unserved and underserved individuals was limited by the data available for analysis. Specifically, PCG was unable to examine the services individuals received at the case level, or data related to expenditures on an individual level. Analysis of case level data may have shed additional light on services received by target populations, discrepancies in satisfaction, and if differences in the volume of services led to differences in successful case closure.

Based on the analysis of available data, the following populations may experience service gaps:

* **Members of minority groups:** Members of minority groups have lower satisfaction levels with VR services and counselors, lower successful case closure rates, and lower wages compared to their peers who are not minorities.
* **Individuals with advanced education:** In open responses, several MCB participants commented that they felt MCB was not as effective at supporting individuals with advanced education. This may relate to the low utilization rate of One Stop Centers reported in the consumer data as well.
* **Individuals who lack adequate transportation, including individuals who live in rural areas:** Across data collection processes and stakeholders, transportation was identified as the greatest barrier to employment and success.
* **Youth with disabilities:** Analysis indicates that exploration into the expansion of availability could increase the number of students served. Increased methods to emphasize community-based Pre-ETS may also better prepare youth for employment after graduation.

Recommendations on how to address these service gaps are described in the following section.

# Recommendations

The recommendations section identifies both recommendations and concrete action steps that MCB can take to address service gaps identified through the course of this evaluation process.

## Improve Services and Outcomes for Individuals who are Minorities

Individuals who are minorities are less likely to agree that they had positive experiences with their VR counselors. The reasons for this are not immediately clear in the research done to this point, and may require a more qualitative, one-on-one focus than the existing research can provide. However, the consistency of this finding across the set of counselor experience questions suggests that there may be a pervasive problem with communication and relationships between VR counselors and minority consumers. Additionally, members of minority groups are less likely to have a successful case closure and earn lower wages on average. While members of minority groups are served at rates higher than expected compared to the population, reported experience and outcomes are less favorable than for those who are not minorities.

MCB should undertake additional research to understand why minority groups are less likely to report a positive experience, and why services result in less favorable outcomes. This may require re-training counselors to better communicate with different ethnic or cultural groups or adapting to new modes and methods of communication. The exact steps necessary to improve communication and service delivery would be discovered within the additional research.

***Call to Action:***

1. Identify gaps in staff knowledge related to cultural responsivity, and responsive and inclusive service delivery.
2. Identify differences in service delivery that may contribute to less favorable outcomes.
3. Identify successful practices and staff who deliver culturally-responsive practices.
4. Develop a strategic training plan addressing identified knowledge and service gaps and leveraging staff strengths.

## Expand Access for Rural Consumers

Focus groups, interviews, and open-ended comments all clearly pointed out that rural areas in Massachusetts feel less well served than those in more urban areas, particularly those in the Boston metro area. Whether or not resources are misallocated is a different question - the perception of a difference in level of service exists. PCG recommends that MCB learn more about the reasons of this perception to determine if there are either communication barriers or those related to service delivery. Additionally, MCB must take clear action to address the needs of rural consumers, including expanding transportation options (see below), and improving access to services.

While in the past this may have been impossible to achieve, modern technology and technology-first service delivery can ease the burden of this. By training counselors, service providers, and consumers in how best to use remote access technologies, MCB can increase access to staff and services without as significant a per consumer cost. MCB should seek ways to expand internet access and develop training and counseling methods that work remotely as a way to alleviate the burdens of rural consumers.

***Call to Action:***

1. Learn more about perceptions and potential gaps in services for individuals living in rural areas.
2. Explore how technology can increase access of services and employment for individuals living in rural areas.

## Improve Coordination and Service Delivery for Consumers with Diverse Employment Goals

Results and analysis indicate that MCB consumers are not frequently using services from MassHire. Such coordination is required by WIOA, and policy and practice is specified in MA’s State Plan. Moving forward, PCG recommends putting continuous improvement processes in place to ensure that policy and practice are effective means to coordinating services under WIOA. Such efficiencies may support job seekers with advanced or diverse employment goals in getting the services, guidance, and connections needed to be successful.

***Call to Action:***

1. Implement policies and practices identified in 2020-2023 state plan.
2. Implement and monitor continuous improvement processes to ensure effective coordination with MassHire.

## 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 M&O 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:
	1. Assistive technology
	2. Skills and tools needed by job seeker
	3. 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.

## Increase Access and Reduce Barriers to Transportation

Transportation was the most commonly cited barrier to consumers achieving their employment goals. Consumers reported encountering this barrier at a far higher rate than they reported receiving transportation services to counter it. This concern was echoed throughout qualitative data as well, with individuals repeatedly citing a lack of transportation, and providers citing an inability to provide meaningful transportation to and from services for a large portion of the individuals with whom they work. While many challenges to finding meaningful transportation options exist, PCG recommends that MCB work to reduce the barriers to employment that individuals report.

Innovative transportation options exist. In focus groups, individuals spoke highly of a pilot ride-sharing program where trips were subsidized by the state, on demand, through apps like Uber or Lyft. Restarting or expanding that program could be considered. Likewise, a minority of consumers reported they were able to access MCB offices via public transit. Advocating for the expansion of public transit options could benefit consumers. So, too, could expanding the availability of orientation and mobility services to help consumers better use existing public transportation options. For example, travel training could be one option to help MCB consumers utilize public transportation independently. In this model, a consumer would work closely with a local mobility manager to learn the public transit system during the times of the day he or she needs it, and would “practice” using the system until the person is comfortable using transportation independently.

Another way to address the transportation barrier is to consider how technology can be used to work outside of the traditional office setting. Many employers who had been resistant to remote workers have transitioned to embracing this option as the COVID-19 global pandemic has hampered in-person work. PCG recommends that MCB work with their counselors, contractors, and consumers to identify opportunities where remote work is possible, as well as how to talk with businesses about taking advantage of technology as a solution to meeting their labor needs.

***Call to Action:***

1. Work with public and private entities to identify mutually beneficial relationships that increase transportation opportunities that align with the labor market.
2. Train counselors, contractors, and consumers how to talk with potential employers about leveraging technology to increase their applicant pool and meet their labor needs.

## Recommendations to Improve outcomes for youth with Visual Impairments

### Examine and Leverage Strengths

Data and analysis indicate that MCB has considerable strengths in several areas including coordination with partners, and VR counselors providing services that respect the student’s culture, background, and identity. PCG recommends that MCB further examine these strengths to identify best and successful practices in coordination and culturally competent and person-centered service delivery.

Once these practices are identified, MCB can consider how they can be extended to other areas within MCB. In particular, these successful practices could be incorporated and expanded to improve coordination and communication with families, teachers, and students, to increase awareness and use of Pre-ETS.

Additionally, highlighting these areas could be an opportunity to build capacity on a national basis. Coordination and the provision of culturally competent, person-centered service delivery is an area that VR agencies across the country are focusing on to meet WIOA requirements as well as to support racial equity at the local, regional and national levels. Leveraging these strengths is an opportunity to build capacity and improve service delivery in both Massachusetts and across the country.

***Call to Action:***

1. Identify and operationalize successful practices in coordination and culturally competent and person-centered service delivery.
2. Implement ways to increase coordination and collaboration that expand partnerships and access to a greater number of students.

### 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 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 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.
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.

### Leverage Technology to Increase Access and Overcome Barriers

Data indicates that geography and transportation limit access to Pre-ETS. PCG recommends that MCB explore the delivery of virtual Pre-ETS to eligible students who may be impacted by these barriers. With continued challenges due to COVID-19, virtual Pre-ETS delivery is being explored across the country. Identifying successful practices from this new challenge may be an opportunity for MCB to increase access for eligible students both now and on an ongoing basis. MCB may consider working with their current Pre-ETS partners to deliver virtual services, or identify and implement successful practices from other states. In addition to exploring the feasibility for providing virtual Pre-ETS, MCB should also consider exploring additional ways for Pre-ETS consumers to access transportation resources where virtual services may not be possible or appropriate, as transportation was cited as one of the most common barriers to service delivery. While the lack of public transit resources or accessibility of public transit presents barriers for Pre-ETS consumers, a variety of local and regional mobility management resources in Massachusetts do exist and could potentially help Pre-ETS consumers to access transportation services where and when they need them to further increase their independence.

***Call to Action:***

1. Explore mechanisms for virtual Pre-ETS.
2. Explore ways to increase service provision using current resources.
3. Explore local and regional mobility management resources to address transportation barriers.

### Increase Community-Based Pre-ETS

Barriers identified by youth related largely to their experience with employment, including limited job experience, lack of opportunities to explore careers, and poor job market or a lack of opportunities. The provision of Pre-ETS can reduce barriers in all of these areas. Additionally, researchers tell us that one of the greatest predictors of employment after high school for individuals with disabilities is employment experience during high school[[10]](#footnote-11).

PCG recommends that MCB work with their partners to increase the use of work-based learning experiences, with an emphasis of experiences outside the traditional school setting. It is recommended that MCB work with Pre-ETS providers to consider how each student served could have increased opportunities for work-based learning in and outside of school. Additionally, MCB may work with Pre-ETS providers on how to increase the number of students served in Pre-ETS to increase overall to employment experiences of students who are blind and visually impaired. Finally, MCB may consider additional, non-traditional partnerships to increase student access to community-based Pre-ETS.

***Call to Action:***

1. Work with Pre-ETS providers to increase each student’s use and access to work-based learning and other community-based Pre-ETS.
2. Educate TVI instructors on recent rule changes that expands eligibility of students.
3. Evaluate opportunities to increase the number of students participating with current Pre-ETS providers in community-based Pre-ETS.
4. Evaluate additional partnerships that could increase student access to community-based Pre-ETS.

## Improve MCB Data Practices

There were several challenges and limitations resulting from MCB’s data collection and management practices. First, analysis was originally planned to examine MCB services, service distribution, and several elements of disability. However, MCB did not provide case management data around service delivery. The data that was provided around service delivery was high level, and did not provide the level of detail needed to provide analysis on trends or themes in service delivery. While there are many valuable results and analysis outside of these data elements, the lack of analysis around service delivery limits this needs analysis. For example, individuals who are minorities indicated that they were less pleased with services from the VR counselor. It would be valuable to explore whether individuals who are minorities received less services, on average, compared to their peers who are not minorities.

Second, the data in case management systems proved difficult to access. This challenge reduced the ability to reach out to contact individuals. Without being able to directly contact and reach out to individuals, PCG’s research was limited in several ways. It became challenging to conduct follow up or reach out to small population groups because of a delay between requests and receipt of information. Without an ability to link individuals to survey responses, additional questions were required and some of them went unanswered, for example, with contact information, complete race and ethnicity data would be present for all survey respondents. This would also have made survey weighting possible to provide the most representative data possible. PCG was also unable to customize outreach efforts for recruitment to better prioritize high value groups. The challenge also resulted in delays of the receipt of data, and data received required cross-walking between differing methods of storage.

Finally, case management data and data on service delivery was frequently incomplete in provided data sources. Within open cases, fields describing secondary disabilities were more likely to have individuals listed with ‘other’ categories- such as ‘other physical impairment’- than they were to have any specific disability other than blindness. The majority of those with a secondary disability listed at all were listed as having blindness as a secondary disability (54%). Almost all of those (99%) also had blindness listed as the primary disability. PCG recommends that MCB evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine if there are ways to increase accuracy and consistency of data, as well as access, to make data usable for decision making.

***Call to Action:***

1. Evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine if there are ways to increase accuracy and consistency of data that can be used to make decisions.
2. Explore the feasibility and opportunities to enhance access of data and reporting to facilitate data-based decision making, with a focus on capturing, maintaining, and using data around service delivery.

# Conclusion

This comprehensive statewide needs assessment provides an evaluation of the landscape where MCB operates, results and analysis describing strengths and opportunities for advancement. This assessment also evaluates the needs of targeted populations, community rehabilitation provider capacity, and coordination with stakeholders. Findings indicate that MCB has a solid position as the vocational rehabilitation provider for Massachusetts residents, who are blind and visually impaired, with successful practices and strong relationships. While there are great strengths, there are areas for growth and improvement as well. Recommendations and calls to action build upon MCB’s groundwork and provide opportunities for closing gaps and improving outcomes. Implementing these recommendations may continue to propel MCB forward trajectory toward innovative practices, data-based decision making, and quality outcomes for job seekers who are blind and visually impaired across Massachusetts.

# Appendices

##  Disability Recoding

PCG recoded the secondary disabilities found in MCB’s case management record for open cases to be more concise and easily analyzed. Similar disabilities were grouped together into larger, more inclusive categories. A complete list of the categories appearing in the data and their recoding is presented below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|   | **PCG Grouping**  |
|   | **Blindness**  | **Cognitive and other mental impairments**  | **Mobility, dexterity and other physical impairments**  | **Deafness and hearing loss**  | **Other Impairments**  |
| **Original Categories**  | Blindness  | Cognitive Impairment  | General Physical Debilitation  | Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory  | Psychosocial Impairment  |
| Other Visual Impairments  | Other Mental Impairment  | Mobility Impairment  | Deafness, Primary Communication Visual  | Communicative Impairments (Expressive/Receptive)  |
|    |    | Manipulation Dexterity Impairment  | Deaf-Blindness  | Respiratory Impairment  |
|    |    | Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Impairment  | Other Hearing Impairment  |    |
|    |    | Other Physical Impairment  | Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory  |    |
|    |    | Other Orthopedic Impairment  |    |    |

## 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 51 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

1. ***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.

1. ***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.Barnstable23.Middlesex

11.Berkshire24.Nantucket

12.Bristol25.Norfolk

13.Dukes26.Plymouth

14.Essex27.Suffolk

15.Franklin28.Worchester

16.Hampden29.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.

**Questions and Data Collection**

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.

**Questions and Data Collection**

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.

**Questions and Data Collection**

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 (TVI)

**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. <https://www.mass.gov/vocational-rehabilitation-vr-for-the-blind> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/pre-employment-transition-services-pre-ets> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance Long-term Occupation Projections Industry-Occupation Employment Projection Matrix for 2018-2028 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. MA Dept. of Unemployment Assistance SOC code 253097 for Teachers and Instructors, All Others, Except Substitute Teachers. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Percentages were calculated as those who “Agree” with the statement. The remainder includes both those who “Disagree” and those who are “Unsure”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Percentages were calculated as those who “Agree” with the statement. The remainder includes both those who “Disagree” and those who are “Unsure”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Ascds%3AUS%3A25ef03e6-a4f7-4084-aa25-40807e3d66fa#pageNum=3> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/25> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [Mazzotti, V., Fowler, C., Mustian, A., Kortering, L. (2009) Evidence-Based Secondary Transition Predictors for Improving Postschool Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. Career Development for Exceptional Individuals. DOI: 10.1177/0885728809346960](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/April_Mustian/publication/247787510_Evidence-Based_Secondary_Transition_Predictors_for_Improving_Postschool_Outcomes_for_Students_With_Disabilities/links/55fc241508aeba1d9f3b699f/Evidence-Based-Secondary-Transition-Predictors-for-Improving-Postschool-Outcomes-for-Students-With-Disabilities.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. [Mazzotti, V., Fowler, C., Mustian, A., Kortering, L. (2009) Evidence-Based Secondary Transition Predictors for Improving Postschool Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. Career Development for Exceptional Individuals. DOI: 10.1177/0885728809346960](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/April_Mustian/publication/247787510_Evidence-Based_Secondary_Transition_Predictors_for_Improving_Postschool_Outcomes_for_Students_With_Disabilities/links/55fc241508aeba1d9f3b699f/Evidence-Based-Secondary-Transition-Predictors-for-Improving-Postschool-Outcomes-for-Students-With-Disabilities.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)