

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind VR Research Initiatives 2020

Scope 4: Pre-ETS Needs Assessment Report

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# Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is the state’s leading agency providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to visually impaired students aged 14 – 21 in Massachusetts. Pre-ETS services have traditionally been provided to eligible students in a school-based or provider setting, and MCB has done an admirable job ensuring that students receive the services they need. According to MCB[[1]](#footnote-2), Pre-ETS services are much more limited under the law than the vocational rehabilitation (VR) services available to students who have applied for and been found eligible for VR services. This includes students who are either legally blind or have been diagnosed with a condition of progressive vision loss resulting in future impairment. A number of different Pre-ETS programs are provided in the five areas below:

1. Job exploration counseling;
2. Work-based learning experiences that may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience 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 that may include peer mentoring.

***All of these areas support MCB’s overarching goal of helping people who are blind obtain and maintain meaningful employment, leading to a life of independence, fulfillment and purpose.***

All organizations go through periods of change and evolution. As such, they must constantly reassess their programs and services to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the consumers they aim to serve. The goals of this Pre-ETS Needs Assessment are to understand the current state of Pre-ETS services in Massachusetts, to identify any gaps in service, and provide recommendations for service improvement.

For this Needs Assessment we reviewed MCB data on Pre-ETS cases to determine Pre-ETS demographics, including race and ethnicity, and severity of disability to determine the current state of services. We used a robust stakeholder engagement strategy that included deployment of consumer and business surveys, focus group facilitation, and key informant interviews. Our outreach to MCB’s target populations provided us with the qualitative data to understand Pre-ETS consumers’ perceptions and feelings on quality of service delivery, their experience working with MCB, and barriers to accessing Pre-ETS services.

Broadly speaking, this Needs Assessment concludes that while MCB and their partners provide quality Pre-ETS services in a way that is relevant to students, there are opportunities for improvement. This report provides a full discussion of the data analysis and results. Notable strengths and barriers include:

***Pre-ETS Program Strengths***

* **Positive relationships with career counselors** – In the consumer survey, the overwhelming majority of Pre-ETS students agreed that their counselor respected their culture, background, and identity. No individuals disagreed with this statement.
* **Well-coordinated partnerships** – Survey results indicated that there is a high degree of service coordination between MCB and partners like the Carrol Center for the Blind.
* **Eagerness to learn new skills** - Focus group participants displayed a unanimous preference for post-secondary training in specialized fields like science and music to further career opportunities.

***Notable Pre-ETS Barriers***

* **Transportation** – Collected data and stakeholder outreach determined that transportation is the most significant barrier to accessing Pre-ETS services and obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
* **Perceived ability for individuals with multiple disabilities to participate in employment-related opportunities** –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 more likely to participate in post-graduation community programming.

***Recommendations and a Call to Action***

In response to the findings identified within this report, PCG developed the following recommendations and associated action steps (“Call to Action”) to highlight how MCB can better address the needs of Pre-ETS Consumers. These recommendations and action steps are summarized below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Recommendation** | **Call to Action** |
| **1** | ***Examine and Leverage Strengths***  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 and operationalize successful practices. | 1. Identify and operationalize best practices regarding MCB-partner coordination and culturally competent, person-centered service delivery. |
| **2** | ***Leverage Technology and Transportation Resources to Increase Access and Overcome Barriers***  Data indicates that geography and transportation limit access to Pre-ETS. PCG recommends that MCB explore delivery of virtual Pre-ETS to eligible students who may be impacted by these barriers. MCB should also explore additional ways for Pre-ETS consumers to 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. |
| **3** | ***Increased Community-Based Pre-ETS***  Barriers identified by youth include limited job experience, lack of opportunities to explore careers, and poor job market or a lack of opportunities. Pre-ETS can help reduce barriers in all of these areas. | 1. Work with Pre-ETS providers to increase each student’s access to and use of work-based learning and other community-based Pre-ETS. 2. Educate TVI instructors on recent rule changes that expands student eligibility. 3. Evaluate opportunities to increase the number of students participating in community-based Pre-ETS. 4. Evaluate additional partnerships that could increase student access to community-based Pre-ETS. |

While Pre-ETS were generally perceived as positive, there is room to expand access to these services through reduction of barriers and the increased use of technology. Additionally, there is an opportunity to help students receiving enhanced Pre-ETS in the community obtain personal employment experience and build relationships to set themselves up for success after graduation. MCB has an opportunity to capitalize on their strengths and use their resources and relationships to build a better tomorrow for students who are blind and visually impaired.

# Introduction

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) seeks to better understand gaps and service needs identified by current recipients of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). MCB has partnered with Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to carefully and rigorously identify these gaps and needs and put forth a series of recommendations that can both recognize strengths and address areas for improvement.

## Acronyms and Glossary

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

Table 1: Common Acronyms

| **Acronym** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| AIM | Accessible Instructional Materials |
| AWARE | Accessible Web-Based Activity and Reporting Environment |
| CAP | Client Assistance Program |
| CMR | Code of Massachusetts Regulations |
| CSNA | Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment |
| DESE | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| DHE | Department of Higher Education |
| IPE | Individualized Plan for Employment |
| MCB | Massachusetts Commission for the Blind |
| PCG | Public Consulting Group, Inc. |
| Pre-ETS | Pre-Employment Transition Services |
| RSA | Rehabilitation Services Administration |
| VR | Vocational Rehabilitation |

## Purpose

MCB has partnered with PCG to conduct an in-depth needs assessment of its Pre-ETS consumers. These consumers are students between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one who are receiving VR services and participating in an internship to prepare them for work (with the goal of a permanent employment offer at their place of internship or elsewhere as they actively seek work).

By studying the needs of this population, MCB seeks to expand the Pre-ETS program to include more youth and thereby encourage the transition to employment (not just a job, but a *career*) while decreasing the reliance on other benefits such as SSI. Ultimately, MCB wishes to communicate to this population that work is connected to independence and community engagement. MCB recognizes that maintaining long-term employment for this population is much easier once they are in the labor force.

PCG will use the analysis / results from this Pre-ETS Needs Assessment Report to inform and expand the overall MCB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). This will, in turn, help to further the CSNA’s goals of identifying potentially unserved and underserved populations.

# Methodology and Approach

The primary goal of this project was to understand the needs of MCB’s Pre-ETS consumers to help them gain the skills and tools to ultimately obtain and maintain sustainable and meaningful employment. Our approach to information collection was twofold, relying on the collection and analysis of quantitative data received from MCB and engagement with MCB’s stakeholders via web-based survey tools, focus groups and key informant interviews.

Analysis of MCB data provided critical insight into MCB’s “current state” of Pre-ETS in terms of consumers served, services provided, and funding. We analyzed information gathered from stakeholder outreach to understand the state of MCB’s Pre-ETS. To ensure a comprehensive approach, PCG worked closely with MCB to identify target populations for stakeholder outreach. Target populations included people from different age groups, diverse geographic locations (urban, suburban, and rural), minorities, Pre-ETS youth, and individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Using this two-pronged approach, PCG assessed the state of MCB’s Pre-ETS and provided meaningful, achievable recommendations for MCB’s consideration.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Data Analysis** | * PCG reviewed the 2017 Pre-ETS Fiscal Forecasting Report to understand the scope of MCB’s Pre-ETS services and funding. * PCG reviewed MCB-provided data on 232 open Pre-ETS cases. |
| **Web Surveys** | * **MCB Consumer Survey:** 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 responses from 33 individuals either receiving, or eligible to receive, Pre-ETS services. * **Business Survey:** PCG received 13 responses from Massachusetts businesses who have worked with MCB. The survey, distributed as part of PCG’s work compiling a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), included questions related to Pre-ETS Services. * **Community Partners Survey:** MCB and PCG created and distributed a survey to individuals and groups that frequently partner with MCB to provide services, work with consumers, and support the disability community. |
| **Focus Groups** | * PCG painted an accurate picture of need by seeking information directly from current Pre-ETS consumers via participation in four online focus groups. We conducted focus groups with Pre-ETS service providers, youth who have received Pre-ETS, and teachers of students with visual impairments (TVI). |

## Data Analysis

PCG reviewed the 2017 Pre-ETS Fiscal Forecasting Report to understand the scope of MCB’s Pre-ETS services and funding. The report included data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Department of Higher Education (DHE), and the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Library, on the number of students potentially eligible for Pre-ETS. The data also provided the number of Pre-ETS consumers served, projected spending (per consumer and in total), and the increase in the number of Pre-ETS consumers reached through targeted outreach and increased coordination activities.

The report highlighted the findings from the most recent MCB Comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey and how it was used to determine the need for Pre-ETS services. Pre-ETS descriptions were also provided, including details on MCB-funded statewide and national programs that meet the definition of Pre-ETS.

PCG also reviewed open cases data as it related to individuals age twenty-one and younger. We used this data to inform research efforts and serve as the baseline for the population figures included in this Needs Assessment. This data was generated in April of 2020 and captured all open cases at that point in time, including those still in the eligibility determination process. In total, we received data on 232 individuals age twenty-one and younger.

## Surveys

### Consumer Survey

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

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

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

MCB invited 2,560 individuals with valid e-mail addresses to participate in the survey. Of these, 882 individuals opened the initial e-mail contact. PCG received 225 surveys in which respondents answered five or more questions. The final survey response rate was 8.8%, including 134 current VR consumers and 91 individuals who did not have an active VR case or were unsure about their case status. Thirty-three (33) individuals who responded to the survey were determined either receiving or eligible to receive Pre-ETS services.

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

### Community Partner Survey

MCB and PCG partnered to create and distribute a survey to individuals and groups that frequently partner with MCB to provide services, work with consumers and support the disability community. We designed this survey to learn more about services provided by community partners, the populations served, working relationships with MCB (and ideas on how to improve these relationships) and to identify perceived gaps in the service landscape.

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

PCG distributed this survey using an anonymous survey link and a respondent-driven sampling methodology frequently called “snowball” sampling. In snowball sampling, the individuals initially invited to complete the survey are encouraged to invite others to complete the same survey, who in turn are encouraged to invite even more community partners to complete the survey, and so on. In total, PCG received fifteen (15) responses to the community partners survey. We are unable to calculate a response rate due to the use of respondent-driven sampling methodology.

## Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

PCG first attempted to develop an accurate picture of need by seeking information directly from current Pre-ETS consumers via participation in online focus groups. We scheduled a total of three Pre-ETS focus groups – one for Pre-ETS providers (conducted on June 5th), two for youth who have participated in Pre-ETS and one for youth who have not participated in Pre-ETS.

PCG conducted the Pre-ETS provider online focus group on June 5th with seven service providers. However, we had difficulty recruiting participants for the other Pre-ETS focus groups. At PCG’s request, MCB’s VR counselors attempted to recruit more youth who have received Pre-ETS into focus groups.

MCB also attempted to recruit youth who have not participated in Pre-ETS at multiple VR Committee Meetings to no avail. This population is difficult to reach due to the fact that they are not required to participate in the full continuum of MCB services. In the end we were able to successfully interview two Pre-ETS students and one parent by targeting youth who have participated in minimal services. Additional attempts at outreach were unsuccessful. As a work around, PCG conducted a focus group for Teachers of Visually Impaired (TVI). This focus group was well-attended with an active, in-depth conversation on a broad range of topics. PCG also conducted a follow-up interview with one person who was unable to attend the TVI focus group.

Table 2: Pre-ETS Focus Groups below provides a summary of Pre-ETS focus groups:

Table 2: Pre-ETS Focus Groups

| Audience | Number of Groups | Total Number of Participants |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Pre-ETS Service Providers | 1 | 7 |
| Youth Who Have Received Pre-ETS | 2 | 2 youth + 1 parent |
| Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) | 1 | 4 teachers = 1 Board member |

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

# Results

The results of our research identified several meaningful findings, including Pre-ETS population demographics, consumers’ thoughts on and perceptions of services received, consumers’ experiences with MCB, and challenges or barriers faced by those receiving Pre-ETS or those that could be eligible to receive Pre-ETS.

We have grouped our results by research method:

* Pre-ETS data analysis
* Surveys
* Focus groups and key informant interviews

## MCB Pre-ETS Data Analysis

PCG examined eligible Pre-ETS consumers with open MCB cases and compared them to the Pre-ETS eligible population survey responses. Table 3: Pre-ETS Eligible Population by Race and Ethnicity displays a breakdown of this population by race and ethnicity. This data represents a shift from the state demographic data as there are a slightly higher number of minorities represented. This correlates to a larger national demographic trend of growing minority populations, particularly in younger age groups.

Additionally, PCG examined the ratio of this population by disability priority category. Table 4: Pre-ETS Eligible Population by Severity of Disability shows the breakdown of the Pre-ETS eligible population by priority category. 16% of all Pre-ETS eligible individuals fall within the Most Significant Disability priority category and the remaining 84% fall within the Significantly Disabled category. While disability priority was not a survey question, we expect the responses to roughly correlate to this ratio.

Table 3: Pre-ETS Eligible Population by Race and Ethnicity

| **Race and/or Ethnicity** | **# of Eligible Individuals** | **% of Eligible** | **Massachusetts** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Asian | 7 | 3.8% | 4.0% |
| American Indian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 1 | 0.5% | 0.5% |
| Black or African American | 20 | 11.0% | 9.6% |
| Other or Multiple Races | 20 | 11.0% | 7.7% |
| White (including Hispanic or Latino White) | 134 | 73.6% | 78.1% |
| **Grand Total** | **182** |  |  |

Table 4: Pre-ETS Eligible Population by Severity of Disability

| **Disability Priority Category** | **# of Individuals** | **% of Individuals** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Most Significant Disabled | 29 | 16% |
| Significantly Disabled | 153 | 84% |
| **Grand Total** | **182** |  |

## Survey Results

PCG received 33 surveys submitted by individuals eligible for Pre-ETS services. Respondents were not required to answer any or all of the questions. PCG first examined the services individuals had received from MCB. By and large, respondents agreed with the majority of the affirmative statements with some notable exceptions. However, 33% of respondents who were sure of their ability to use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services had a negative response. This may indicate that the office is not in a primary service delivery location, there are gaps within the public transportation system, or highlight an urban-rural issue. Additionally, three questions elicited a significant or majority response of “unsure”, including “I can get around easily in MCB offices”, “I can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services” and “I helped develop my plan or IEP”.

Table 5: Pre-ETS 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. For example, meetings scheduled at a time I could attend, large print, help filling out forms, or interpreters. | 27 | 1 | 4 |
| 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. | 21 | 3 | 8 |
| I received the testing or assessments I needed. | 20 | 3 | 9 |
| I helped develop my plan or IPE (Individual Plan for  Employment). | 15 | 2 | 15 |

With regard to consumer experiences within the Pre-ETS cohort, the vast majority of individuals agreed with each of the affirmative statements. A notable standout finding is that the overwhelming majority agreed that their counselor respected their culture, background, and identity, with no individuals disagreeing with that statement. No individual statements garnered significant or notable disagreement, and only a few exhibited a high number of “unsure” responses.

Table 6: Pre-ETS 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 |

A minority of individuals experienced barriers to employment in each category. However, each barrier category still showed a significant number of individuals encountering that barrier to employment as seen in Table 7: Pre-ETS Individuals' Responses to Participant Survey - Barriers.

Most individuals experiencing at least one barrier to employment in the “basic needs” category chose transportation as the major issue. Eight out of thirty-three respondents selected this as a barrier, representing over half of the population experiencing issues with basic needs. Three individuals selected multiple basic needs barriers.

Five individuals showed barriers to employment within the “legal” barrier category. All five of these selected the “other” category with only one elaborating that it was related to “guardianship”. One individual selected multiple legal barriers.

No single category garnered a majority for the eleven individuals who experienced a “financial” barrier. Two individuals experienced multiple financial barriers.

Fourteen individuals experienced “job-related challenges” with fairly equal distribution among specific barriers. Eight of the fourteen individuals experienced multiple barriers and five of these individuals encountered three or more job-related barriers.

No individuals experienced a benefits counseling barrier. This could be due to the Pre-ETS focus.

Table 7: Pre-ETS Individuals' Responses to Participant Survey - Barriers

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

Survey results suggest there are 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 but indicated a need for services falls anywhere between 20-40%. Although the survey sample was small, this points to the possibility of a wider gap in services. It is interesting to note that generally, individuals who responded “yes” did so across most if not all of the questions, as did individuals responding “no, but I need this” as seen in Table 8: Pre-ETS Services. This suggests that there are service gaps in Pre-ETS availability rather than individual components are not being offered.

Table 8: Pre-ETS Services

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **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 9: Settings for Pre-ETS Services displays the settings where services were performed, with the majority in a school classroom or facility setting. Four individuals chose a community-based setting (some with disabilities and some without).

Table 9: Settings for Pre-ETS Services

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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 |

Table 10: Partners for Individuals Eligible for Pre-ETS displays the number of individuals eligible for Pre-ETS that are receiving services from MCB VR partners. As expected, the most commonly associated partners include the Perkins School for the Blind, the Carroll Center for the Blind, the schools, and MassHealth.

Table 10: Partners for Individuals Eligible for Pre-ETS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Are you receiving services from any of the following vocational rehabilitation partners?** | **# of Individuals** |
| Perkins School for the Blind | 14 |
| MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) | 7 |
| Carroll Center for the Blind | 7 |
| Department of Education (K-12) | 6 |
| Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities) | 5 |
| Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission | 3 |
| Someone else | 3 |
| Department of Developmental Services | 2 |
| None of the above | 2 |
| Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | 1 |
| One-Stop Career Center | 1 |
| Department of Public Health | 0 |
| Department of Elder Services | 0 |
| MAB Community Services | 0 |
| Massachusetts Office on Disability | 0 |
| Lowell Association for the Blind | 0 |

Table 11: Coordination with Partners of Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals shows the level of coordination between these partners and MCB. There were many positive reviews on coordination. However, the Department of Education and MassHealth were selected as “not well” but the low sample size may suggest an anomaly rather than a finding.

Table 11: Coordination with Partners of Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **How well did MCB coordinate services**  **with the following groups you worked with?** | **Well** | **Not Well** | **Unsure** |
| Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Department of Developmental Services | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Department of Public Health | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Department of Elder Services | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| MAB Community Services | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Massachusetts Office on Disability | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Department of Education (K-12) | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities) | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Carroll Center for the Blind | 8 | 0 | 3 |
| Perkins School for the Blind | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lowell Association for the Blind | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| One-Stop Career Center | 3 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 12: Supports Provided by MCB for Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals** shows the selections of MCB supports for the Pre-ETS eligible individuals provided directly by MCB.

Table 12: Supports Provided by MCB for Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Did MCB provide you with any of these services?** | **# of Individuals** |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 6 |
| Group and peer support | 3 |
| Help with transportation | 5 |

Table 13: Supports Connected Through MCB for Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals shows the supports MCB either helped coordinate or helped individuals connect to the services.

Table 13: Supports Connected Through MCB for Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Did MCB help connect you with any of these services?** | **# of Individuals** |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 1 |
| Group and peer support | 1 |
| Help with transportation | 7 |

Table 14: Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals and Behavioral Support Services gauges the level of MCB support or connection to behavioral support services. This survey did not seek to determine the level of need for behavioral support services, but it does reflect the need within the Pre-ETS population. Numbers may be low due to other payers providing adequate services. For example, MassHealth or private insurers covering these services as mandated by Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) requirements that have expanded into the behavioral health realm in recent years.

Table 14: Pre-ETS Eligible Individuals and Behavioral Support Services

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Has MCB helped you get any of the services below?** | **# of Individuals Answering “Yes”** |
| Behavioral supports (services from a behavior analyst, or using a behavior plan) | 1 |
| Mental health treatment (for example, counseling) | 1 |
| Substance use treatment | 0 |
| Something else (What was that?) | 0 |
| None of these | 21 |
| Unsure | 0 |

PCG also surveyed community partners on the adequacy of Pre-ETS services in their community as seen below in Table 15: Community Partner Survey Results. A total of ten responses were received, with five respondents choosing not to answer. Generally, community partners felt the services were sometimes adequate, with some room for improvement. Of note is a slightly higher increase in those who rated the transition coordination process as “rarely adequate”. PCG asked respondents who rated services as rarely adequate or below to provide written feedback. Two trends became apparent; community partners stressed the need to connect the individual’s goals to the process and the need to help keep those students engaged with the services. The need for work experience was called out specifically as something that could help address these two issues.

Table 15: Community Partner Survey Results

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Never adequate | Rarely adequate | Sometimes adequate | Always adequate | Unsure |
| Job exploration counseling | 0% | 10% | 70% | 0% | 20% |
| Work-based learning experiences | 0% | 10% | 70% | 10% | 10% |
| Counseling on post-secondary education options | 0% | 0% | 70% | 0% | 30% |
| Workplace readiness training | 0% | 10% | 70% | 10% | 10% |
| Instruction in self-advocacy | 0% | 10% | 60% | 10% | 20% |
| Pre-employment transition coordination | 0% | 20% | 60% | 0% | 20% |

## Focus Groups

PCG conducted two specific Pre-ETS focus groups to learn about Pre-ETS services, one for Pre-ETS participants and one for Pre-ETS providers. Also, a focus group for Teachers of students with Visual Impairments (TVI) provided valuable Pre-ETS insights.

**Pre-ETS Participants**

The Pre-ETS participants and/or family members focus group provided insight into a variety of topics. The participants expressed a ***unanimous preference for post-secondary training into specialized fields such as science or music to further career opportunities***. They also provided insight into their 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 to report. All participants in this conversation were fairly new to Pre-ETS services. This newness combined with COVID-19 pandemic constraints seemed to be causing service disruptions as participants indicated that they were having a difficult time getting started into a solid program.

**Pre-ETS Providers**

Participants in the Pre-ETS provider focus group represented a diverse group of providers with varying program formats to make a representative sample across the state.

When discussing service barriers, ***the overwhelming theme was transportation as 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 and in the same general age range is difficult.

Other barriers of note include the ***difficulties of managing program transitions and the lack of an effective recruiting mechanism***. Program awareness seemed light in other research, and providers also claimed difficulty with awareness and accessing families.

**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***.

Regarding the use of MCB services, focus group participants pointed to recent rule changes that had expanded eligibility to more of their students. This expanded eligibility is viewed positively but ***utilization of services is still not widely adopted due to a lack of information on MCB services***.

When discussing significant barriers, two trends emerged. First, the ***lack of independent or public transportation was cited as a significant barrier to accessing services before and during transition phases***. Second, some TVI focus group participants expressed that some individuals were enabled into dependence. Students lacking community and social interaction and experiences 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.

# Analysis

In this section we provide a high level analysis of the combined results of our data findings and information learned from surveys, focus groups and interviews.

## Population Statistics and Demographics

The Pre-ETS eligible population within MCB largely mirrors Massachusetts demographics overall. A slight shift in this younger population towards a greater representation of minorities is in line with the overall national trends. Survey questions show that MCB has overwhelming agreement that the VR counselors have shown tremendous cultural, background, and identity respect.

## Strengths

The survey highlighted several strengths throughout MCB’s programs. Experiences with VR counselors have largely been positive with little disagreement with the stated survey questions. Both the experiences and services used by the Pre-ETS population have been received positively with no obvious areas of disagreement. With the exception of the Department of Education (k-12), participants stated that MCB did a good job of coordinating services with its partners, particularly the Carroll Center for the Blind and post-secondary schools.

## Areas for Improvement

The survey questions and focus groups showed significant barriers in accessing services. Transportation is constantly mentioned as a barrier to obtaining services for a variety of reasons, such as the geographical nature of Pre-ETS programming combined with a small eligibility population. From the client perspective transportation was selected as the most common barrier for individuals. Other barriers were raised, including significant job-related barriers. While no single barrier was overwhelmingly selected, its notable that a majority who experienced barriers in this category showed multiple individual barriers, with 36% selecting 3 or more barriers. This category included the following individual barriers:

* 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 this age group is unlikely to have job experience at this point, obvious concerns include access to career exploration opportunities and the observance of employer attitudes.

One other service issue that was raised was access to Pre-ETS services. Anywhere from 20-40% of individuals indicated that they were not currently receiving Pre-ETS services but needed them. General trends indicate that individuals typically indicated that more than one service was needed, while those receiving services typically marked so across all categories. Most individuals indicated they were missing several Pre-ETS services, and this is indicative of access versus service delivery issues. Service delivery issues would be typified by individually identified services not being offered rather than a range of services.

## Data Gaps

From a services and experiences perspective, a large number of participants were unsure how they felt about some of the statements. Without comments to help clarify, this could be due to the statement not being applicable or the individual does not remember long passed events. It would prove useful to analyze the level of services the Pre-ETS eligible population have used overall as this information was unavailable for comparison at the time of this report. Open ended questions or selections of “Other” did not often include a narrative or written detail that could have provided more context.

# Recommendations

In this section we present our recommendations for addressing the findings identified throughout this report. The recommendations and associated “Call to Action” directly reflect the data, analysis and interpretation of information gathered during this project. To note, the “Call to Action” components of each recommendation outline specific action steps MCB can take as MCB seeks to further explore or implement the recommendation.

## 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 / successful practices in coordination and culturally competent and person-centered service delivery.

Once identified, MCB can consider how these practices can be extended to other areas within MCB. Focusing on these areas and leveraging these strengths is an opportunity to build capacity and improve service delivery both in Massachusetts and 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 and support racial equity at the local, regional and national levels.

***Call to Action:***

1. Identify and operationalize successful practices in coordination and culturally competent and person-centered service delivery.

## Leverage Technology to Increase Access and Overcome Barriers

Data indicate that geography and transportation limit access to Pre-ETS services. 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 could be an opportunity for MCB to increase access for eligible students, both now and on an ongoing basis. MCB should 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 of providing virtual Pre-ETS services, 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.

## Increased 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[[2]](#footnote-3).

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

# Conclusion

Data and analysis indicate that MCB and their partners provide quality Pre-ETS services in a way that is relevant to students. There are opportunities to expand and extend these successful practices to improve outcomes and services in Massachusetts, and potentially on a larger scale. MCB may also consider how to leverage successful practices and partnerships to support further innovation for Massachusetts students who are blind and visually impaired. While the services delivered are perceived as positive, there is room to increase access to these services through reduction of barriers and increased use of technology. Additionally, there is the opportunity to support students receiving enhanced Pre-ETS in the community to obtain personal experience in employment and build relationships to set themselves up for success after graduation. Looking toward the future, MCB has an opportunity to capitalize on their strengths, and use their resources and relationships to build a better tomorrow for students who are blind and visually impaired.

# 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 |  |  |

## Consumer Survey Instrument

### Introduction

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

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

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

This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete.

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

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

### Survey Instrument

Demo08

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

1 I am completing the survey independently

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

MCB Services

Services01

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

I receive MCB services in a convenient place.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services02

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services03

I can get around easily in MCB offices.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services04

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services05

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services06

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services09

I received the testing or assessments I needed.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Services10

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Service12

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

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

2 No

Service13

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

MCB Counselor

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

Experience01

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience02

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience03

My counselor respects my culture, background, and identity.

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience04

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience05

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

1 Strongly agree

2 Agree

3 Disagree

4 Strongly disagree

9 Unsure

Experience06

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Barriers to Employment

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

Barrier02a

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

1 Housing

2 Transportation

3 Childcare

4 Food

5 Clothing

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

95 None

Barrier02b

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

1 Criminal offenses

2 Immigration status

3 An ongoing discrimination case

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

95 None

Barrier02c

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

1 Potential loss of benefits

2 More money

3 Educational or training funding

4 Benefits counseling

5 Additional benefits (medical coverage, dental coverage)

6 Resources for people with disabilities

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

95 None

Barrier02d

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

1 Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities

3 Poor job market or a lack of opportunities

4 Limited relevant job skills

5 Limited work experience

6 Lack of opportunities to explore careers

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

95 None

Barrier03

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

1 Yes

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

9 Unsure

Barrier04

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

PreEts01

[ASK IF AGE <=21; ELSE EMPSER01]

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

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

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts02

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

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts03

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

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts04

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

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts05

Have you received training in self-advocacy?

1 Yes

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreEts06

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

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

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

2 A school classroom

3 A facility that only helps people with disabilities

PreEts06

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

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

2 No, but I need this

3 No, I do not need this

4 Unsure

PreETS08

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Community Service Partners

Partner01

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

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

10 Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

11 Department of Developmental Services

12 Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

13 Department of Public Health

14 Department of Elder Services

15 MassHealth (Office of Medicaid)

17 Department of Veteran’s Services

18 Massachusetts Office on Disability

21 Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation

22 Department of Education (K-12)

23 Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities)

24 Carroll Center for the Blind

25 Perkins School for the Blind

95 Someone else (Who was that?)

97 None of the above [SKIP TO SUPPORT01]

99 Unsure

Partner02a-l

[ASK OF ALL GROUPS SELECTED IN PARTNER01]

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

1 Very well

2 Somewhat well

3 Not very well

4 Not at all well

9 Unsure

Partner03

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Partner04

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Support Services

Support01

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

11 Family and/or caregiver support

12 Group and peer support

13 Help with housing

14 Independent living skills training

16 Social security benefits counseling

17 Moving from a group home facility to independent living

18 Help with transportation

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

97 None of these

99 Unsure

Support02

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

11 Family and/or caregiver support

12 Group and peer support

13 Help with housing

14 Independent living skills training

15 Medical care

16 Social security benefits counseling

17 Moving from a group home facility to independent living

18 Help with transportation

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

97 None of these [GO TO MHS01]

99 Unsure

Support03

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Mental Health Services

MHS01

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

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

11 Mental health treatment (for example, counseling)

12 Substance use treatment

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

97 None of these [GO TO FINAL04]

99 Unsure

MHS02

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final Questions

Final01

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final02

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final03

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Final04

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

1 [OPEN TEXT]

Tell Us About You

Demo01

What sex were you assigned at birth?

1 Male

2 Female

9 I’d prefer not to say

Demo01a

What gender do you currently identify as?

1 Male

2 Female

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

9 I’d prefer not to say

Demo01b

Do you identify yourself as identify yourself as …?

1 Straight

2 Gay

3 Lesbian

4 Bisexual

5 Other: [OPEN TEXT])

6 Not applicable

Demo03

Do you have a tribal affiliation?

1 Yes (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

2 No

9 I’d prefer not to say

Demo04

What language do you mostly speak at home?

10 English

11 Spanish

12 Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese)

13 Vietnamese

14 Russian

15 American Sign Language

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

Demo09

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

10 Working full time

11 Working part time

12 Going to school or in training

13 Retired

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

## Community Partners Survey

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

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

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

Your Organization

Org01

What type of organization do you work for?

1 For-profit service provider agency

2 Non-profit service provider agency

3 Advocacy organization

4 Government organization

5 Independent consultant

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Org02

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

1 Administrative staff (Executive, manager)

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

3 Independent contractor

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Org03

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

10 Blindness and visual disabilities

11 Deafness and hearing loss

12 Intellectual and/or developmental disabilities

13 Communication disabilities

14 Manipulation

15 Mobility

16 Respiratory disabilities

17 Brain injury

18 Mental health disabilities

19 Substance use disorder

95 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

97 Unsure

Org04

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

10 Benefits counseling

11 Child welfare

12 Education

13 Employment

14 Healthcare services

15 Housing

16 Independent living

17 Law enforcement

18 Mental health services

20 Substance use

21 Transportation

22 Tribal services

95 Other (Please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

Org05

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

1 People with the most significant disabilities

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

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

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

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

Org06

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

10. Barnstable 23. Middlesex

11. Berkshire 24. Nantucket

12. Bristol 25. Norfolk

13. Dukes 26. Plymouth

14. Essex 27. Suffolk

15. Franklin 28. Worchester

16. Hampden 29. Entire state [EXCLUSIVE]

17. Hampshire

MCB (VR)

VR01

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

1 Yes

2 No [GO TO COLLAB01]

VR02

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

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

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

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

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

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

Collab01

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:

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

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Agree

4 Strongly agree

9 Don’t know

VR04

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

VR05

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

VR03

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

Capacity of Community Rehabilitation Providers

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

Collab02

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

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Agree

4 Strongly agree

9 Unsure

Collab03

[ASK IF COLLAB02 <=2]

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

1 Low quality of provider services

2 Not enough providers available in area

4 The VR contracting process is difficult for vendors

5 Providers lack staff with skillsets to work with specific disabilities

7 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

8 Don’t know

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

Collab04

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

Pre-ETS Services

Pre-ETS01

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

1 Yes

2 No [GO TO EMPREL01]

PreETS02

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

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

A. Job exploration counseling

B. Work-based learning experiences

C. Counseling on post-secondary education options

D. Workplace readiness training

E. Instruction in self-advocacy

F. Pre-employment transition coordination

PreETS03

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

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

PreETS04

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

[OPEN TEXT]

Employment Related Supports

EmpRel01

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

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

A. Vocational assessment

B. Vocational counseling

C. Technical training

D. Academic education

E. Vocational tuition assistance

F. Job placements

G. Job coaching

H. Self-employment supports

I. Post-employment services

EmpRel02

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

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

EmpRel03

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

Support Services

Support01

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

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

A. Referrals to community resources

B. Family and caregiver support

C. Group and peer support

D. Housing

E. Independent living skills training

F. Medical care

G. Social security benefit planning

H. Transition services from institution to community

I. Transportation

Support02

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

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

Support03

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

Mental Health Needs

MHS01

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

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

A. Behavioral supports

B. Mental health treatment

C. Substance use treatment

MHS02

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

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

MHS03

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

Group Needs

CSNAGroup01

[IF SERVE THE MOST SIGNIFICANTLY DISABLED IN ORG05]

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

CSNAGroup02

[IF SERVE MINORITY INDIVIDUALS IN ORG05]

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

CSNAGroup03

[IF SERVE YOUTH IN ORG05]

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

Barriers to Achieving Employment Goals

Barrier01

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

1 Housing

2 Transportation

3 Childcare

4 Food

5 Clothing

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

Barrier02

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

1 Criminal offenses

2 Immigration status

3 An ongoing discrimination case

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

Barrier03

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

1 Potential loss of benefits

2 Higher income

3 Educational or training funding

4 Benefits counseling

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

6 Resources for people with disabilities

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

Barrier04

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

1 Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities

3 Poor job market or a lack of opportunities

4 Limited relevant job skills

5 Limited work experience

6 Lack of opportunities to explore careers

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

Barrier05

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

1 Yes

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

9 Unsure

Barrier06

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

Barriers07

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

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

10 People with intellectual disabilities

11 People with physical disabilities

12 People who are between the ages of 14 to 21

13 People who are racial or ethnic minorities

14 People with a mental health condition

15 People with substance use disorder

16 People who have criminal convictions

17 People who live in rural areas of the state

18 People who are LGBTQ+

19 People who are homeless

20 Veterans

21 People living in rural areas.

95 Other (please specify: [OPEN TEXT])

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

Final Questions

Final01

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

Final02

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

Thank you!

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

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

[SURVEY LINK]

## Moderator’s Guide: MCB VR Participants

Introduction Script

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions and Data Collection

1. Introduction to Services

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

2. Strengths

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

3. Areas to Improve

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

4. Barriers

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

5. Solutions

What would make working with MCB easier or better?

6. Partners

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

7. Coordination

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

8. Recommendations

Would you recommend MCB services to other individuals with disabilities?

9. Final Question

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

END

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

## Moderator’s Guide: Pre-ETS Consumers

Introduction Script

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

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

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

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

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

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

Help participants go around the room to introduce themselves.

Questions and Data Collection

1. Introduction

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

2. Vocational Rehabilitation

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

3. Solutions

Are there something that could be better?

4. Other Programs

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

5. Open Pre-ETS

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

END

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

## Moderator’s Guide: MCB VR Staff

Welcome and Introduction

[BEGIN RECORDING]

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

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

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

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

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

Q01 – Success Factors

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

Q02 – Barriers and Challenges

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

Q03 - Unserved and Underserved Populations

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

[TAKE NOTES PUBLICALLY]

Q04 – Underserved Solutions

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

Q05 – Community Rehabilitation Providers

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

- if the staff had the skills to serve them,

- if there were enough staff, and

- if they were served in a timely fashion.

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

END

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

## Moderator’s Guide: VR Service Providers

Welcome and Introduction

[BEGIN RECORDING]

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

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

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

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

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

Q01 – Success Factors

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

Q02 – Barriers and Challenges

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

Q03 - Unserved and Underserved Populations

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

[TAKE NOTES PUBLICALLY]

Q04 – Unserved and Underserved Solutions

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

Q05 – Community Rehabilitation Providers

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

- if the staff have the skills to serve client,

- if there are enough staff, and

- if clients are served in a timely fashion.

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

END

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

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

Welcome and Introduction

[BEGIN RECORDING]

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

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

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

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

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

Q01 – Services Landscape

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

Q02 – What’s Working Well

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

Q03 – Barriers and Challenges

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

Q04 - Unserved and Underserved Populations

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

[TAKE NOTES PUBLICALLY]

Q05 – Provider Capacity and Training

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

Q06 – Business/Community Engagement and Involvement

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

Q07 – Coordination

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

END

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

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

Introduction Script:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Help participants go around the room to introduce themselves.

Questions and Data Collection

1. Introduction

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

2. Working with MCB

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

3. Reasoning

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

4. Barriers

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

5. Programs

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

6. Open

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

END

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

## Stakeholder Interview Guide

Initial contact:

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

Introduction Script:

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

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

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

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

2. What populations does your organization primarily serve?

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

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

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

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

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

8. What could be better?

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

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

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

END

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

1. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/pre-employment-transition-services-pre-ets> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [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-3)