Massachusetts Commission for the Blind VR Research Initiatives 2020

Scope 3: Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment Report

August 31, 2020

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# Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is the state’s leading agency in providing Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) to Massachusetts residents who are blind or visually impaired.

VR programs are designed to give people who have disabilities the rehabilitation and social services they need to obtain and maintain meaningful employment. Blind applicants for MCB’s VR services are generally referred to MCB by optometrists or ophthalmologists since eligibility is determined in part by their examinations and the individual’s placement on the Central Register. Once a person is determined to be eligible for VR services through MCB, an employment objective is established in the person’s Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), and the person can begin to receive the services that will ultimately help them secure employment. A host of VR services are provided by MCB including:

* VR counseling and guidance
* Vocational education
* Job exploration
* Workplace readiness training
* Self-advocacy education
* Assistive-technology training
* Orientation and Mobility
* Career services (i.e. job-search assistance and on-the-job support)

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

All organizations go through periods of change and evolution and must assess the needs of their programs and services to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the people they aim to serve. The goal of this Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment is to understand the current state of VR services in Massachusetts, identify any gaps in service, and provide recommendations for service improvement.

This Needs Assessment analyzes MCB VR case management and American Consumer Survey (ACS) data to determine VR demographics, including race and ethnicity, and severity of disability to assess the current state of services provided.

The Assessment also uses a robust stakeholder engagement strategy that includes deployment of consumer and business surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews. This outreach to MCB’s target populations provides us with the qualitative data we need to understand Vocational Rehabilitation consumers’ perceptions and feelings on quality of service delivery, their experience working with MCB, and barriers to accessing VR services.

The results and analysis of This needs Assessment indicate that the VR services MCB provides support quality services, with positive feedback from the majority of consumers. However, there are several areas for expansion and growth. A full discussion of the data analysis and results is provided in this report. Notable findings include the following highlights:

***Vocational Rehabilitation Services Strengths***

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

***Notable Vocational Rehabilitation Barriers***

* **Transportation** – All data collection methods and stakeholder outreach determined that transportation is the most significant barrier to receiving Pre-ETS services as well as to obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
* **Minority VR Consumer Satisfaction** – Overall, VR consumers were pleased with their VR counselor and the services they received. However, minority individuals were less likely to report positive experiences in a variety of interactions with their counselors. They also reported inadequacies in receiving consumer testing or assessments.
* **Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities** – Over half of survey respondents (validated by discussion points made in stakeholder focus groups and interviews) indicate that employer attitudes toward people with disabilities is a significant barrier to obtaining employment.

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

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

|  | **Recommendation** | **Call to Action** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | ***Expand Access for Rural Consumers***Focus groups, interviews, and open-ended comments all clearly highlighted that rural areas in Massachusetts feel less well served than those in more urban areas, particularly those in the Boston metro area. Resources may or may not be misallocated, but the *perception* of a difference in level of service exists. | 1. Learn more about perceptions and potential gaps in services for individuals living in rural areas.
2. Explore how technology can increase access of services and employment for individuals living in rural areas
 |
| **2** | ***Increase Access and Reduce Barriers to Transportation*** Transportation was the most commonly cited barrier to consumers achieving their employment goals. | 1. Work with public and private entities to identify mutually beneficial relationships that increase transportation opportunities that align with the labor market.
2. Train counselors, contractors, and consumers how to talk with potential employers about leveraging technology to increase their applicant pool and meet their labor needs.
 |
| **3** | ***Identify Barriers to Minority Service and Counselor Relationships***Minority individuals are less likely to agree that they had positive experiences with their VR counselors. The reasons for this were not explored in depth in our research and may require a more qualitative, one-on-one focus. | 1. Identify gaps in staff knowledge related to cultural responsivity, and responsive and inclusive service delivery.
2. Identify successful practices / staff who deliver these culturally-responsive practices.
3. Develop a strategic training plan addressing identified knowledge gaps and leveraging staff strengths.
 |
| **4** | **Improve MCB Data Practices**PCG originally planned to examine MCB services, service distribution, and several elements of disability. However, MCB was not able to provide detailed service delivery data. The service delivery data we did receive was high-level and did not contain the detail we needed to analyze trends or themes in service delivery | 1. Evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine if there are ways to increase accuracy and consistency of service data that can be used to make decisions.
2. Explore the feasibility of and opportunities to enhance access to data and reporting to facilitate data-based decision making, with a focus on capturing, maintaining, and using service delivery data.
 |
|  |  |  |

The MCB services delivered are generally perceived as positive. However, there is room to increase access to and improve services through reduction of barriers, enhancement of relationships, increased access to services and the job market for consumers who live in rural areas, and increased use of technology. MCB is well-positioned to use their resources, innovation, and opportunities to improve employment outcomes for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

# Introduction

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) seeks to better understand the gaps and service needs identified by current recipients of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. MCB has partnered with Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to complete a comprehensive statewide needs assessment and to carefully and rigorously identify these gaps and needs, recognize strengths, and put forth a series of recommendations that 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 here for reader ease of reference.

Table 1: Common Acronyms

| **Acronym** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| AWARE | Accessible Web-Based Activity and Reporting Environment |
| CAP | Client Assistance Program |
| CMR | Code of Massachusetts Regulations |
| CSNA | Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment |
| 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

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) has partnered with Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to conduct an in-depth Needs Assessment of its Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services consumers.

According to federal law, VR consumers are people who have a disability of legal blindness which for that person constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment; the person must require VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. In short, VR services exist to provide the skills and pathways to lasting, meaningful employment for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

By studying the needs of this population, MCB seeks to expand and enhance the VR program to include more eligible consumers 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.

PCG will use the analysis / results from this Vocational Rehabilitation 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 VR consumers so that they may ultimately obtain and maintain sustainable and meaningful employment. Our approach to information collection for this project was twofold. It relied on the collection and analysis of qualitative data received from MCB and engagement of MCB’s stakeholders via web-based survey tools, focus groups and key informant interviews.

The information gathered from the analysis of MCB and American Consumer Survey (ACS) data provided critical insight into MCB’s “current state”. We analyzed information gathered from stakeholder outreach activities to understand the state of MCB’s VR services. PCG worked closely with MCB to identify target populations for outreach to ensure a comprehensive approach to stakeholder outreach. These populations included people from different age groups, people from diverse geographic locations (urban, suburban, and rural), minorities, Pre-ETS youth, and individuals with the most significant disabilities.

This two-pronged approach allowed us to analyze and assess the state of MCB’s VR services and provide meaningful, actionable recommendations to MCB for consideration.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Data Analysis**  | * PCG reviewed demographic data provided by MCB from the case management system on 952 currently open VR cases. We requested detailed service delivery data that unfortunately could not be readily provided. We did receive high-level service data through the RSA 911 reports.
* PCG reviewed and analyzed data from the American Consumer Survey (ACS) for individuals in Massachusetts who reported a visual impairment
* PCG used these data sources to compare the MCB data to overall Massachusetts data for a variety of factors.
 |
| **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 225 completed 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 either did not have an active VR case or were unsure about their case status.
* **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 VR service related questions.
* **Community Partners Survey:** MCB and PCG created and distributed a survey to MCB community partners who provide services to MCB consumers and support the disability community.
 |
| **Focus Groups** | * PCG conducted six focus groups with a variety of audiences in order to learn more about individuals’ experiences with MCB, the services provided by MCB, MCB strengths and potential service gaps. Focus groups included service providers, individuals receiving MCB VR services, youth who received pre-ETS, and teachers of students with visual impairments who may or may not receive pre-ETS services.
 |
| **Interviews** | * PCG conducted three interviews with individuals from MCB stakeholder organizations to supplement information collected via surveys and focus groups.
 |

## Data Analysis

MCB provided PCG with a data set of their currently active cases exported from their case management system so that PCG could assess the current state of VR services. The data set included information on open and active cases at the time of export, April 2020, information on cases for which no finding of eligibility had been determined, and basic MCB consumer demographic information (including age, racial data, disabilities, and diagnosis). It did not contain any information that could be used to identify MCB consumers, contact information, or detailed, individualized service utilization data (although service category was included).

PCG was able to review high level data utilization information available through the federal RSA 911 report. However, the lack of detailed service delivery data limited our analysis.

PCG relied on the American Communities Survey (ACS) for basic Commonwealth of Massachusetts population descriptions. The US Census Bureau (USCB) conducts the ACS. It is available for public use and is the largest ongoing survey in the United Sates. The ACS includes basic population data on all Americans and demographic details such as gender, race, and information about disability. For more information on the ACS methodology, please reference the published information provided by USCB at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology.html>.

It is important to note that the way the ACS defines disability is potentially wider than the definition used by MCB. The ACS asks a series of yes/no questions regarding whether an individual has trouble with a group of tasks or abilities. This approach tends to reflect that a higher portion of the population are disabled than would actually qualify for services through any VR program. In particular, older Americans are very likely to report having trouble with the listed tasks.

## 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. PCG used results from the MCB Consumer Survey in multiple scopes of work, including this VR 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 VR consumers/participants; individuals with closed VR cases; individuals for whom MCB had an e-mail address but no finding of eligibility was ever made/services received; and youth enrolled in pre-employment transition (Pre-ETS) services. Individuals were also allowed proxy responses; responses by a parent, spouse or caretaker familiar with the targeted individual’s situation and concerns.

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

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

### Business Survey

MCB and PCG also partnered to create and distribute a survey for businesses that frequently work with MCB. This survey was designed to collect information on a variety of topics, including business’ use of tax incentives, apprenticeships, modern internet-enabled work, MCB business services, and businesses’ experience working with MCB.

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 to a respondent-driven sampling methodology more frequently called “snowball” sampling. In snowball sampling, the individuals initially invited to complete the survey are also encouraged to invite others to complete the survey, who in turn are encouraged to invite even more businesses to complete the survey, and so on. In total, PCG received thirteen (13) responses to the business survey. Due to the respondent-driven method of distribution, we cannot calculate a response rate.

### Community Partners Survey

Finally, 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. This survey was designed to learn more about the services provided by community partners, populations served, working relationships with MCB, and ideas on how to improve these relationships in order 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 to a respondent-driven sampling methodology more frequently called “snowball” sampling. In snowball sampling, the individuals initially invited to complete the survey are also encouraged to invite others to complete the 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. Due to the respondent-driven method of distribution, we cannot calculate a response rate.

## Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

PCG conducted a series of focus groups with a variety of audiences in order to learn more about individuals’ experiences with MCB, the services provided by MCB, MCB strengths and potential service gaps. We conducted focus groups with service providers, individuals receiving MCB VR services, youth who received pre-ETS, and teachers of students with visual impairments who may or may not receive pre-ETS. Focus group audiences, the number of focus groups conducted for each audience and total number of focus groups participants are delineated in the Table 2 below.

Individual MCB consumers proved difficult to contact throughout the research effort. We made multiple outreach attempts and continuously rescheduled groups to accommodate consumer schedules. Despite our efforts, Despite our efforts we met with limited consumer participation success, particularly with consumers whose cases had closed. These consumers are, by definition, those with the lowest levels of MCB contact and frequently lack up-to-date outreach and contact information. As a work-around, we included this closed case population in our consumer survey outreach effort. While not initially planned, this effort garnered notably more success. (See the Consumer Surveys below for more detail.)

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

Table 2: Summary of Focus Groups Conducted

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

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

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

# Results

The results of our research identified several meaningful findings, including demographics of VR populations both within MCB and as a comparison with Massachusetts as a whole; consumers’ perceptions and thoughts about the VR services they have received and their experiences with MCB; and highlighted challenges or barriers that consumers receiving VR services have faced.

Results in this section include findings from the following research methods:

* MCB and ACS Data Analysis
* Surveys
* Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

## MCB and ACS Data Results

In this section of our report we present our analysis of MCB’s current caseload compared to the most recent American Communities Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates on those in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with visual disabilities. Our comparison highlights how MCB’s current service population differs from the state of Massachusetts as a whole. Please refer to the Methodology section of this report for more detail on the ACS data and how we have used it here.

PCG examined the following factors in the MCB and ACS data sets:

* Age
* Race and Ethnicity
* Geographic Distribution of Cases
* Primary and Secondary Disabilities

### Age

MCB VR consumers are notably younger than people in Massachusetts with a visual impairment as seen in Table 3. This is unsurprising considering that VR services are aimed at those looking to establish or continue their careers, and population-wide, visual impairments are most likely to effect individuals beyond retirement age. As the data depicts, the highest percentage (24.4%) of MCB’s open VR cases belongs to the youngest age group (14-21 year-olds), while conversely, the highest percentage (48.2%) of individuals in Massachusetts with a visual impairment belongs to people who are 65 and older.

Table 3: Age

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

*N=952*

### Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity analysis in Table 4 and Table 5 shows that MCB’s open cases are similarly distributed percentage-wise among American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Other or Multiple Races, and Unknown as the overall visually impaired percentages in Massachusetts. Conversely, MCB open cases among Black or African American, and Hispanic individuals of any race are roughly 10% higher than those with visual impairments in Massachusetts, and open case counts among White people are over 11% less for MCB versus in Massachusetts.

Table 4: Race

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

*N=952*

Table 5: Hispanicity

|   | **MCB Open Cases** | **Massachusetts** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hispanic or Latino | 12.6% | 2.1% |
| Not Hispanic or Latino | 86.8% | 97.9% |
| Unknown | 0.6% | 0% |

*N=952*

### Geographic Distribution

The age distribution of MCB participants may also affect the geographic distribution of MCB cases as seen in Table 6. Currently, MCB consumers are more likely to be located in more urban counties than the distribution of individuals with visual impairments in Massachusetts. In fact, Suffolk county and the three surrounding counties (Essex, Middlesex and Norfolk) contain almost a third (65.8%) of all current MCB participants compared to only about half (52.6%) of individuals with visual impairments in Massachusetts overall. According to ACS data, young individuals are more likely to be found in highly urban areas than older individuals, as are more ethnically and racially diverse populations.

Table 6: Geographic Distribution

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

*N=952*

### Primary and Secondary Disabilities

When looking at types of disability served, MCB’s focus on individuals with blindness is clear. Data provided by MCB shows that more than three-quarters (78.2%) of those whose primary disability is blindness have no secondary disability, or their secondary disability is also a vision impairment as seen in Table 7. While blindness alone constitutes the largest portion of disabilities analyzed, MCB also serves 64.7% of people with deaf-blindness as a primary disability. It is important to note that PCG re-coded and grouped disability categories in order to complete our analysis because several MCB data groups were too small to analyze independently. See the Appendix section of this report for more detail on category groupings.

Table 7: Primary and Secondary Disabilities

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

*N=952*

## Survey Results

MCB and PCG distributed a Consumer Survey to both active (current) and inactive (not current) MCB consumers. Over half of the respondents agreed – whether a current consumer or not – that their MCB counselor respected their culture, background, and identity; their counselor responded in a timely way to their questions, concerns, or needs; their counselor explained why they were eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services; they received services in a place that was convenient for them; MCB provided them with the technology or equipment they needed to receive services; and MCB provided the accommodations they needed to receive services. The top five barriers identified through the survey were transportation (almost 70% of respondents reporting a barrier); employer attitudes toward people with disabilities; resources for people with disabilities; potential loss of benefits; and poor job market or a lack of opportunities.

| **Strength** | **Barrier** |
| --- | --- |
| Respect from MCB counselors | Transportation |
| Competence of MCB counselors | Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities |
| Convenience of services | Resources for people with disabilities |
| Technology and equipment | Potential loss of benefits |
| Accommodations | Poor job market/ lack of opportunities |

PCG analyzed survey results in the following topic areas:

1. The MCB VR Consumer Experience
2. Basic Needs Barriers
3. Legal Barriers
4. Financial Barriers
5. Job-Related Barriers
6. Other Barriers
7. Key Partners of Individuals with Open Cases & Partnership Coordination
8. MCB Provided Support Services & MCB Coordinated Services
9. Community Partners’ View of Services

### The MCB VR Consumer Experience

This section includes analysis of differences in experience reported by minority individuals, including racial minorities (individuals reporting being, in part, any race other than White), ethnic minorities (those who report being Hispanic, regardless of race) and those who report being a member of the LGBT+ community. We combined these groups in order to produce a large enough results sample for analysis outlined in Table 8.

Among those reporting as active VR participants, the majority agreed to most of the affirmative, positive statements regarding their service experience. While most statements garnered significant majorities, two categories for all individuals with open cases were between 50-60% and two categories were below 50%. 57.9% of all individuals with open cases believed they received the testing and assessments they needed while 55% affirmed they helped develop their IPE. Less than 50% of all individuals with open cases agreed that MCB offices and services were available via public transportation. However, clients seldom, if ever, need to visit MCB offices; staff appointments take place in clients’ homes or workplaces. Only 38.6% of all individuals with open cases found MCB offices easy to navigate. This could be due to our calculation methods since we grouped “Unsure” with those who disagree. Many individuals who had not physically visited an MCB office may have marked “Unsure”.

Members of minority groups were less likely than non-minority groups to agree they received needed services and accommodations. These differences are small and within the margin of error. Taken in conjunction with one another, it suggests that members of minority groups may have a harder time accessing needed MCB services or encountered barriers to these services. The largest difference was seen in receiving needed testing or assessments where minority participants were 16.8-percentage points less likely to agree.

Table 8: Survey Responses on Service Experience[[1]](#footnote-2)

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** | **Difference** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I receive services in a place that is convenient for me. [A/D] | 88.7% | 91.5% | 87.1% | -4.5% |
| MCB provided the accommodations I needed to receive services. [A/D] | 79.4% | 77.1% | 80.6% | 3.5% |
| MCB provided me with the technology or equipment I needed to receive services. [A/D] | 79.4% | 83.1% | 80.6% | -2.5% |
| The MCB office is open at times that work for me. [A/D] | 62.8% | 68.1% | 64.5% | -3.6% |
| I received the testing or assessments I needed. [A/D] | 57.9% | 59.2% | 48.4% | -10.8% |
| I helped develop my plan or IPE [A/D] | 55.0% | 62.0% | 45.2% | -16.8% |
| I can use public transportation to get to MCB offices and services [A/D] | 48.1% | 48.6% | 48.4% | -0.2% |
| I can get around easily in MCB offices. [A/D] | 38.6% | 41.4% | 35.5% | -5.9% |

*N>=131*

Among those reporting on their experiences working directly with MCB, all except one statement garnered a majority of affirmative, positive agreement as seen in Table 9. MCB achieved high marks (over 80%) for respecting client culture, background, and identity and addressing questions and concerns in a timely way. Of note, only 48% of respondents agreed that the counselor helped them understand their career options and only 58% of respondents felt their counselor had talked to them about their choices when developing their plan for employment. In general, affirmative, positive agreement percentages for members of a minority group fell below their non-minority counterparts. Only 71% of minorities agreed that their counselor responded in a timely way to questions, concerns or needs vs. 80.2% of non-minorities, a 16.4% difference.

Table 9: Counselor Interactions

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** | **Difference** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| My counselor respects my culture, background, and identity. [A/D] | 87.4% | 88.7% | 77.4% | -11.3% |
| My counselor responded in a timely way to my questions, concerns, or needs. [A/D] | 80.2% | 87.3% | 71.0% | -16.4% |
| My counselor considered my interests, strengths, abilities, and needs when developing my rehabilitation plan. [A/D] | 70.1% | 70.4% | 67.7% | -2.7% |
| My counselor explained why I was eligible or not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. [A/D] | 68.5% | 70.4% | 61.3% | -9.1% |
| My counselor informed me of my rights during the VR process. [A/D] | 66.9% | 67.6% | 61.3% | -6.4% |
| My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment. [A/D] | 57.9%[[2]](#footnote-3) | 60.0% | 61.3% | 1.3% |
| My counselor helped me understand the sorts of careers I can pursue. [A/D] | 48.0% | 53.5% | 41.9% | -11.6% |

*N>=124*

### Basic Needs Barriers

Table 10 shows the barriers experienced by respondents across categories of basic human needs. Overall, transportation was the greatest single barrier, with 60% of respondents experiencing this problem. Housing also proved to be a significant issue, with 1 in 4 experiencing housing issues. Notably, housing also shows a large disparity between non-minorities and minority groups, with 32% of minorities experiencing housing issues vs 19% of non-minorities. Members of a minority group experienced barriers at a higher level than non-minorities across four categories: housing, food, clothing, and childcare.

A large contingent of respondents cited “Some Other Basic Needs” barriers. MCB may want to explore this area further to clarify these barriers.

Table 10: Basic Needs Barriers

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Housing | 26.0% | 19.0% | 32.0% |
| Food | 11.0% | 6.3% | 16.0% |
| Clothing | 9.0% | 4.8% | 12.0% |
| Childcare | 8.0% | 4.8% | 12.0% |
| Transportation | 61.0% | 61.9% | 60.0% |
| Some Other Basic Need(s) | 21.0% | 23.8% | 20.0% |

*N=100*

### Legal Barriers

Table 11 shows that respondents experienced legal barriers at far lower rates than other barrier categories. One in five respondents experienced some other legal need outside of immigration, discrimination cases, or criminal offenses. Minority respondents displayed slightly higher barrier rates for immigration status and discrimination case status but lower rates for criminal offenses or other legal needs.

Table 11: Legal Barriers

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Immigration status | 6.0% | 6.3% | 8.0% |
| An ongoing discrimination case | 4.0% | 3.2% | 8.0% |
| Criminal offenses | 1.0% | 1.6% | 0.00% |
| Some other legal need(s) | 19.0% | 22.2% | 12.0% |

*N=100*

### Financial Barriers

Table 12 shows the financial barriers to services and working faced by respondents with open cases. All categories except for benefits counseling and some other financial need(s) proved to be significant financial barriers. 35% of respondents with open cases viewed available resources for people with disabilities as a barrier. In general, a higher percentage of members of a minority group cited barriers vs. those not in a minority group. Also notable is benefits counseling as a significant barrier among those in a minority group vs. those not in a minority group.

Table 12: Financial Barriers

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Potential loss of benefits | 25.0% | 25.4% | 24.0% |
| Additional benefits (medical coverage, dental coverage) | 22.0% | 20.6% | 24.0% |
| Benefits counseling | 14.0% | 11.1% | 20.0% |
| Educational or training funding | 26.0% | 20.6% | 36.0% |
| Resources for people with disabilities | 35.0% | 38.1% | 32.0% |
| More money | 27.0% | 22.2% | 36.0% |
| Some other financial need(s) | 9.0% | 11.1% | 4.0% |

*N=100*

### Job-Related Barriers

In addition to previously cited transportation, job-related barriers tended to be the most significant barriers for participants as seen in Table 13. Almost 50% of respondents selected “Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities” as a barrier to work. 36% of participants also cited “Poor job market or lack of opportunities” and “Limited work experience” as barriers to work. All other barriers to work categories were cited by at least 20% of participants. Except for lack of opportunities and work experience, members of a minority group showed higher rates of barriers to work with “Lack of opportunities to explore careers” at almost double the rate of the non-minority population.

Table 13: Job-Related Barriers

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lack of opportunities to explore careers | 24.0% | 17.5% | 36.0% |
| Employer attitudes toward people with disabilities | 49.0%[[3]](#footnote-4) | 52.4% | 56.0% |
| Poor job market or a lack of opportunities | 36.0% | 36.5% | 36.0% |
| Limited work experience | 36.0% | 38.1% | 28.0% |
| Limited relevant job skills | 22.0% | 19.0% | 28.0% |
| Some other job-related challenge(s) | 20.0% | 19.0% | 24.0% |

*N=100*

### Other Barriers

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

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

### Key Partners of Individuals with Open Cases & Partnership Coordination

Table 14 shows the key partners for individuals with open cases. As expected, some key partnerships stand out while others are very rarely used. Close to half of all respondents were working with the Carroll Center for the Blind. MassHealth, selected by 36% of respondents, also proved to be a significant partner. Other key partners were post-secondary schools and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. PCG also measured MCB’s coordination with the partnerships shown in Table 15 on a rating scale from 1 to 4 where 4 is the highest score (most coordination) possible. Overall, MCB’s coordination with partners was rated an average of 3.4 or “good” by respondents.

Table 14: Key Partners of Individuals with Open Cases

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Carroll Center for the Blind | 47.2% | 48.8% | 52.2% |
| MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) | 36.1% | 32.6% | 43.5% |
| Post-secondary schools (community colleges, universities) | 16.7% | 18.6% | 13.0% |
| Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission | 12.5% | 16.3% | 4.3% |
| MAB Community Services | 9.7% | 11.6% | 8.7% |
| Department of Education (K-12) | 5.6% | 2.3% | 8.7% |
| Department of Developmental Services | 4.2% | 2.3% | 0% |
| Massachusetts for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | 2.8% | 0% | 8.7% |
| Department of Public Health | 1.4% | 0% | 4.3% |
| Department of Elder Services | 1.4% | 2.3% | 0% |
| Massachusetts Office on Disability | 1.4% | 0% | 4.3% |

*N=72*

Table 15: MCB Partnership Coordination Rating

|  | **Score** | ***N*** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **All Open Cases** | 3.4 | 51[[4]](#footnote-5) |
| **Not a minority** | 3.5 | 31 |
| **Member of a minority** | 3.3 | 17 |

### MCB-Provided Support Services & MCB-Coordinated Services

Table 16 displays the services used by the survey respondents that were directly provided by MCB. The two most significant services include Independent living skills training and transportation. 44% of survey respondents have received independent living skills training directly from MCB while 29% have received transportation services from MCB in the past. Table 17 displays the services used by survey respondents that were coordinated by MCB. Independent skills training and transportation were the most used. MCB coordinated transportation for close to 40% of respondents.

Table 16: MCB-Provided Support Services

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 17.8% | 18.0% | 15.0% |
| Group and peer support | 12.3% | 12.0% | 10.0% |
| Help with housing | 6.8% | 8.0% | 5.0% |
| Independent living skills training | 43.8% | 48.0% | 40.0% |
| Social security benefits counseling | 20.5% | 20.0% | 25.0% |
| Moving from a group home facility to independent living | 2.7% | 0.00% | 10.0% |
| Help with transportation | 28.8% | 32.0% | 25.0% |
| Unsure | 11.0% | 8.0% | 10.0% |

*N=73*

Table 17: MCB-Coordinated Services

|  | **All Open Cases** | **Not a minority** | **Member of a minority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family and/or caregiver support | 5.5% | 6.0% | 0.00% |
| Group and peer support | 12.3% | 14.0% | 10.0% |
| Help with housing | 9.6% | 10.0% | 10.0% |
| Independent living skills training | 26.0% | 26.0% | 30.0% |
| Social security benefits counseling | 17.8% | 18.0% | 20.0% |
| Moving from a group home facility to independent living | 1.4% | 0.00% | 5.0% |
| Help with transportation | 38.4% | 44.0% | 25.0% |
| Something else | 5.5% | 8.0% | 0.00% |

*N=73*

### Community Partners’ View of Services

Community partners who completed the survey generally had an extremely high opinion of MCB and the services offered as seen in Table 18. While they did provide some comment and areas for suggested focus, most of the feedback was highly positive. This group perceives MCB as an active and effective partner and MCB staff as generally highly skilled and interested in consumer success. Community partners mentioned a few areas for improvement, although the number of respondents to the survey was limited.

Asked to rate how well they felt MCB was performing certain key tasks, community partners were much more likely to report being unsure rather than disagree across all items. For certain tasks, a majority of responding partners noted they were unsure of MCB’s performance. This suggests partners may not be fully aware of the entire scope of MCB services. If this is the case, these community partners may have difficulty guiding consumers towards the MCB services they need to be most successful.

Table 18: Community Partners Agreement with Key Aspects of MCB Services

|  | **Agree** | **Unsure** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The individuals I work with receive MCB services in a convenient place. | 72.7% | 27.3% |
| MCB provides the individuals I work with the accommodations needed for services. For example, meetings scheduled at a time I could attend, large print, helped me fill out forms, or provided interpreters. | 72.7% | 27.3% |
| MCB provides the individuals I work with the technology or equipment needed to receive services. For example, talk to text software or a communication device. | 72.7% | 18.2% |
| Individuals that I work with receive the testing or assessments they need. | 45.5% | 45.5% |
| Individuals I work with help to develop their own IPE (Individual Plan for Employment). | 41.7% | 58.3% |
| MCB collaborates successfully with my organization to support people with visual impairments in achieving their employment goals. | 66.7% | 33.3% |

*N>=11*

While community partners were generally very positive about MCB staff and services, they were much less likely to believe the supports in their communities meet the present level of need as seen in Table 19. Asked about a range of community supports, community partners were unlikely to state that these supports were always adequate to meet the present level of need. These community partners perceived at least some level of unmet need, even if they were very satisfied with MCB services as they presently exist.

Table 19: Adequacy of Employment Supports

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

*N=10*

Likewise, a high proportion of community partners who responded to the survey said they were unsure of the adequacy of community supports in their community as seen in Table 20. Specifically, some community partners perceived housing supports and independent living skills training available to consumers in their community as ‘never adequate’. However, the number of community partner responses to the survey was relatively low.

Table 20: Adequacy of Community Supports

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

*N>=10*

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

“Transportation and benefits counseling are the two greatest barriers to employment.” – Service Provider

## Focus Group and Key Informant Interview Results

This section outlines the feedback received from individuals participating in PCG-facilitated focus groups and targeted key informant interviews. PCG held six focus group discussions with thirty individuals. Represented were Pre-ETS providers, MCB providers, MCB staff, Pre-ETS participants, VR participants, and teachers of students with visual impairments. Discussion centered around strengths and barriers.

Focus group participants indicated that successful job seekers had different traits in common. These traits included self-advocacy skills, motivation, technology skills and mobility skills. Another critical indicator of success is when a job seeker knows and can communicate what accommodations they need. While these traits were identified as strengths in successful job seekers, focus group participants indicated that a lack of these skills resulted in additional employment barriers.

Several barriers also emerged across the focus groups including the stigma of disability and employer perceptions. English as a second language was identified as a barrier to securing and maintain employment. Another barrier identified in focus groups was the lack of resources for interpreters. Although everyone participating in a focus group agreed that transportation is not currently an issue due to COVID-19, it was mentioned throughout the discussions as one of the biggest barriers to receiving services and securing and maintaining employment.

In addition to the focus groups, PCG interviewed three key stakeholders representing advocacy groups, special education, and transition-aged youth. Mobility skills were mentioned as a barrier for those individuals not already possessing them. Stakeholders indicated that the education system itself could be a barrier to learning mobility skills and independently navigating through school buildings and campuses. Another theme raised during interviews was the subject of self-advocacy skills and how important it is to have these skills in all aspects of life – school, work and socially – and that MCB should place great emphasis on helping individuals develop these skills.

Strength and barrier themes that emerged during focus group and key informant interviews are summarized in Table 21:

Table 21: Strengths and Barriers

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strength** | **Barrier** |
| Self-advocacy skills | Transportation |
| Mobility skills | Accessibility |
| Motivation | Mobility skills |
| Technology skills | Education system |

### Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments

Overall, focus group feedback mirrored survey results. ***The most important factor emphasized by all groups, but in particular by youth service providers, was the inaccessibility of transportation.*** This was particularly true of providers serving rural regions, but this issue was also raised during discussions of consumers based in and around metro Boston. Providers seemed well-informed about transportation options, including MBTA’s blind access card, but emphasized that transportation services were not well suited to many consumers, and that consumers lacked the skills to use them properly without guidance. Providers serving consumers in more rural regions cited a near absence of transportation options. There are few public transportation routes, limited sidewalks, and expensive private market options like Uber, Lyft or taxis. These are limiting factors to achieving employment.

### VR Participants

***Focus groups also identified accessibility as a barrier.*** Difficulties with local and workplace neighborhoods highlighted the need for improved accessibility options such as roads, crosswalks and technology. Transportation issues and the need for more technology options were reoccurring themes in the Pre-ETS focus group. It is worth noting that all participants supported MCB and were happy with the services they had received.

### MCB Staff

MCB staff were queried about success factors for the individuals they work with. A common theme among their answers was “soft skills” and interpersonal skills. These workplace skills occur in tandem with factors such as self-advocacy and can strongly influence employment success. They include the ability to have constructive dialogue between individuals and VR counselors or employers. Staff also stated that both motivation and technology skills play a large role in success. The MCB staff highlighted transportation, but also mentioned public-school systems, accessibility, and a lack of motivation as significant barriers.

MCB staff were also asked about unserved or underserved populations. The group felt that younger children had harder transitions to VR when they did not receive early intervention services. Group members also stated that individuals with secondary cognitive conditions such as autism were underserved, and that not enough staff were trained to help these individuals.

### MCB Service Providers

PCG also conducted a focus group with service providers who were asked about success factors. The group cited motivation, commitment and open-mindedness as success factors. The provider group had several different barrier considerations when compared to other focus groups. Job advertisement, application processes and websites are all difficult and time-consuming to navigate without direct provider assistance. Providers also mentioned motivation and personal skills as barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. Motivation and the loss of benefits was mentioned as a significant barrier. Loss of benefits was also cited in the survey as a barrier to employment. It is worth noting that MCB service providers were happy to be MCB vendors and spoke of their MCB partnership in very positive terms.

# Analysis

In this section we analyze our MCB and ACS data, and information from surveys, focus groups and interviews. We have summarized our high-level findings below:

* **Demographics** – *MCB* *is doing an admirable job targeting those populations that are most difficult to reach and serving those it is mandated to serve.*
* **Racial and Ethnic Considerations –** *There are no apparent racial or ethnic minority communities being underserved by MCB.*
* **Geographical Distribution –** *While MCB’s VR open case population clusters around urban parts of the Commonwealth, individuals in more rural regions of the state can feel neglected, and perceive a lack of opportunity to engage in the full range of MCB services and experiences.*
* **The MCB Consumer Experience** *– Overall, individuals with open MCB VR cases report a positive consumer experience. Nonetheless, three areas where respondents did not feel positive include the availability of and accessibility of transportation, accessibility and ease of movement around MCB offices, and members of minority groups who were less likely to report positive experiences in a variety of interactions with their career counselors.*

### Demographics

Considering the overall demographics of the visually impaired in Massachusetts as described in the American Community Survey, MCB is doing an admirable job targeting populations that are most difficult to reach and serving those it is mandated to serve. MCB’s VR population skews notably younger than the population of individuals with visual impairments in Massachusetts as almost half (48.2%) of the Massachusetts population is composed of individuals who are aged 65 and older. Because many of these individuals are past retirement age, they are much less likely to be seeking out VR, career advancement or career skill opportunities. However, MCB provides a range of social and independent living services that this population may find useful outside of MCB’s VR program.

### Racial and Ethnic Considerations

MCB VR services over-represent individuals of almost all racial and ethnic minority groups. Many of these differences are small, less than a percent. MCB’s open cases are 10 percentage points more likely to be Black or African American (19.6% in MCB’s population versus 9.6% of Massachusetts residents with a visual impairment). This is also true of the Hispanic or Latino population (12.6% vs. 2.1%). While a majority of MCB participants are White, we did not find evidence of any racial or ethnic minority communities being underserved by MCB.

### Geographical Distribution

MCB’s open VR case population clusters around urban parts of the Commonwealth, particularly the greater Boston area. Almost two-thirds (65.8%) of all MCB VR cases are residents of Suffolk County or one of the three surrounding counties. This may be a case of, and caused by, MCB’s focus on younger and minority populations who tend to live in more urban areas. Focus groups and open-ended survey and interview responses both suggest that individuals in more rural portions of the state can feel neglected by MCB services and perceive a lack of opportunity to engage in the full range of MCB services and experiences.

### The MCB Consumer Experience

Overall, individuals with open MCB VR cases report a positive experience. There are only three specific MCB services and counselor questions in which a majority of open cases do not agree with a positive statement.

First, a minority of open cases agree that MCB offices are easily (physically) accessible. Only 48.1% report being able to access MCB offices and services using public transportation, although this may reflect a lack of public transit options vs. the actual location of MCB offices. Transportation is the most frequently cited barrier to employment (61% of open cases reporting a barrier identified transportation as a barrier), and a lack of transportation resources was a common theme mentioned in focus groups and open-ended survey responses. Almost two-thirds of open cases reporting a barrier indicated that transportation was a barrier for them. Fewer than one-third (28.8%) of open cases reported that they received MCB help with transportation services and 38.4% stated they received these services from an outside provider. This may reflect a gap in services that needs to be addressed by MCB or a lack of state or federal funding for general transportation needs.

Second, only about two-in-five (38.6%) agreed that they can easily navigate MCB offices, although MCB consumers rarely need to access an MCB office to receive services. In focus groups, VR and TVI staff focused on the criticality of orientation and mobility skills for successful employment. MCB should evaluate whether their current suite of orientation and mobility services effectively meets the needs of consumers trying to navigate unfamiliar places in and around metro Boston to a new workplace.

Third, a minority of open cases agreed that counselors helped consumers understand the sorts of careers they could pursue (48.0%). Members of a minority group were less likely to report positive experiences in a variety of interactions with their counselors. Members of a minority group with an open case were more likely to report a positive experience than members of a non-minority group in only one out of seven instances (‘My counselor talked to me about my choices when developing my plan for employment’). Members of a minority group with an open case were 8-percentage points less likely to agree to positive statements, on average, across all counselor experience questions. This consistency suggests a failure of communication or understanding between members of minority groups and counselors that should be addressed by MCB.

# Recommendations

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

## Expand Access for Rural Consumers

Focus groups, interviews, and open-ended comments all clearly highlighted how rural areas in Massachusetts feel less well served than those in more urban areas. Resources may or may not be misallocated but there exists the perception of a different service level. PCG recommends that MCB explore the reasons driving this perception to determine if they are communication barriers or related to service delivery.

Modern technology and technology-first service delivery can help MCB addresses the needs of rural consumers, including expanding transportation options (see below) and improving access to services. By training counselors, service providers, and consumers in how best to use remote access technologies, MCB can increase access to staff and services without a significant increase in per consumer cost. MCB should seek ways to expand internet access and develop training and counseling methods that work remotely as a way to address rural consumers’ concerns.

***Call to Action:***

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

## Increase Access and Reduce Barriers to Transportation

Transportation was the most commonly cited barrier to consumers achieving their employment goals. Consumers reported encountering this barrier at a far higher rate than they reported receiving transportation services to counter it. This concern was echoed throughout the qualitative data. Individuals repeatedly cited a lack of transportation and providers cited an inability to provide meaningful transportation to/from services for a large number of individuals with whom they work.

While there are many challenges to overcome, PCG recommends that MCB reduce the barriers to employment by exploring meaningful transportation options. In focus groups, individuals spoke highly of a pilot ride-sharing program where on demand trips with Uber or Lyft were subsidized by the state. MCB could consider restarting or expanding this program. Likewise, a minority of consumers reported they were able to access MCB offices via public transit. Advocating for the expansion of public transit options could benefit consumers. So, too, could evaluating and/or expanding the availability of orientation and mobility services to help consumers better use existing public transportation options. For example, exploring ways to expand available travel training could help MCB consumers use public transportation independently. For example, a consumer would work closely with a local mobility manager to learn the public transit system during the times of the day s/he needs it, and would “practice” using the system together until the person is comfortable using transportation independently. Making this training more widely available could increase consumer confidence in their ability to navigate while expanding their employment opportunities.

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

***Call to Action:***

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

## Identify Barriers to Minority Service and Counselor Relationships

Members of minority groups are less likely to agree that they have had positive experiences with their VR counselors. The reasons for this are not immediately clear due to the limited scope of this research, and may require a more qualitative, one-on-one focus. However, the consistency of this finding suggests there could be issues with communication and relationships between VR counselors and consumers who are minorities.

MCB should undertake additional research to understand why consumers who are minorities are less likely to recall positive experiences with their VR counselors. This may require re-training counselors to better communicate with different ethnic or cultural groups or adapting to new modes and methods of communication.

***Call to Action:***

1. Identify gaps in staff knowledge related to cultural responsivity and responsive and inclusive service delivery.
2. Identify successful practices and staff who deliver culturally-responsive practices.
3. Develop a strategic training plan addressing identified knowledge gaps and leveraging staff strengths.

## Improve MCB Data Practices

Several challenges and limitations came to light during our exploration of MCB’s data collection and management practices. We originally planned to examine MCB services, service distribution, and several elements of disability. However, MCB could not easily provide in-depth service delivery case management data. The service delivery data we received did not provide the level of detail we needed to analyze trends or service delivery themes. This shortcoming limited our needs analysis. For example, individuals who are minorities indicated that they were less pleased with services provided by their VR counselor. It would be interesting to know whether members of minority groups received less services, on average, compared to their non-minority peers.

Second, case management data limitations hampered our ability to reach out to consumers. Our inability to directly contact consumers limited us in several ways. We were unable to conduct follow-up or contact small population groups. Without the ability to link individuals to survey responses, some of our additional questions went unanswered. For example, we were unable to obtain race and ethnicity data for all survey respondents. Our ability to weigh surveys was limited. We were unable to target our outreach efforts to better prioritize high value groups. Data delivery was delayed and sometimes required cross-walking between different storage methods.

Finally, case management and service delivery data were frequently incomplete regarding data sources. For example, open case fields describing secondary disabilities were more likely to list ‘other’ categories – such as other physical impairment – then they were to list a specific disability other than blindness. The majority of open cases with a secondary disability of blindness (54%) almost all had blindness listed as the primary disability (99%).

PCG recommends that MCB evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine if there are ways to increase data accuracy and consistency to make it more useful for decision making.

***Call to Action:***

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

# Conclusion

Our Needs Assessment found that MCB provides quality VR services that generate positive feedback from the majority of consumers. However, MCB consumers who are minorities report their service experience with VR counselors less positively than by their peers who are not minorities. MCB should further examine this finding to understand its cause and draft a strategic plan for addressing need(s). Also, MCB consumers living in rural areas are generally less satisfied than those living in urban regions. PCG provided several recommendations and specific action steps to increase access to services, transportation, and employment opportunities for this population.

MCB should continue collaboration and innovative thinking and initiatives to leverage and expand its strong services and relationships. This approach can help mitigate transportation barriers. Evaluating technology applications and identifying and expanding successful technology practices can also help mitigate transportation barriers and increase access to services and the job market for all MCB consumers, particularly those who live in rural areas. MCB should consider employing innovative technologies in service delivery, accommodations, technology-first support strategies and negotiating remote work options to respond to a market increasingly reliant on remote workers. Lastly, MCB should evaluate administrative policies, practices, and systems to determine if there are ways to increase data accuracy and consistency to make it more useful for decision making

MCB is well-positioned to use their resources, innovation, and opportunities to improve employment outcomes for individuals 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. Percentages were calculated as those who “Agree” with the statement. The remainder includes both those who “Disagree” and those who are “Unsure”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Lower than both “Not a Minority” and “Member of a Minority” categories due to some “Unsure” responses from participants with unknown race or minority status. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Lower than both “Not a Minority” and “Member of a Minority” categories due to some responses from participants with unknown race or minority status. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Higher than both “Not a Minority” and “Member of a Minority” categories due to some responses from participants with unknown race or minority status. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)