

Massachusetts State Rehabilitation Council

An Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

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

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

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

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

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

- a) Needs Assessment Committee determined that transportation remains a significant need for many MRC consumers.
- b) MRC should refine and update its transportation fact sheets on MRC's website as needed and incorporate these into trainings and informational materials based upon its research
- c) Development of other informational materials and training should be considered to assist consumers in learning about other available resources including:
 - a. Local Councils on Aging
 - b. EOHHS Human Service Transportation (HST) Office
 - c. MBTA pilot project with Uber and Lyft
 - i. MRC should request for more information
- d) MRC should continue to research collaboration with MassRides, MassMobility, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Career Centers, the HST office, local and regional planning boards, and other organizations on projects or programs that might be able to assist consumers with transportation, given that transportation is a systemic issue requiring collaboration on multiple levels.
 - a. open a discussion on ideas to address the transportation issues facing MRC consumers and individuals with disabilities and how MRC can work together
- e) MRC should also do a survey of its offices to find out more about how its local staff are connected to the local transportation regional coordinating councils.

- f) A plan should be formed to initiate a group of volunteers across the state to drive people to work and back.
- g) This task has many roadblocks but it may be feasible with a co-coordinated effort on the part of many agencies. Regional data should be compiled to possibly have alternative choices based on the demographics of the people and area.
- h) Improve transportation access to consumers by one or more of the following options:
 - a. Establishing a petty cash/revolving fund at each area office for immediate transportation needs (e.g., cash for gas or a cab is cheaper than paying a vendor; North Carolina and South Carolina VR use such funds);
 - b. Putting a local registered taxi company on the state contract (Indiana VR does this);
 - c. Partnering with Uber/Lyft/other ride-share companies (Georgia VR does this);
 - d. Partnering with the entities that fill gas for state vehicles (that entity should already be on the state contract) to allow consumers to get gas from those entities (New Hampshire welfare does something similar);
 - e. Obtaining a credit card from a local gas station (or a state credit card) for each area office tied to a state account that can be used by staff to get gas to a consumer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

can already write purchase orders (POs) for and thereby also know what services MRC cannot pay via PO.

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

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

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

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

- a) The MRC has made a commitment to reach out to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are also ethnic and cultural minorities through its Diversity Committee and through its Language Access Plan.
- b) The MRC should continue these outreach efforts to ethnic and cultural minorities, especially to the Asian community, which has been identified as slightly underserved by the VR program in Massachusetts.
- c) As growth in the Asian community continues to be seen in the state's general population, it is recommended that MRC continues its outreach efforts to Asian communities in particular.
 - a. There was growth in the number of Asian consumers served by MRC during FY2018 but it still remains below the proportion in the overall state population.
- d) MRC conducted a focus group of Asian consumers in the Lowell office during Fall 2018.
 - a. Information from this focus group and additional consultation with MRC's Diversity Committee yielded a wealth of information and suggestions on additional steps MRC can take in this area to further engage with the Asian community
 - b. It is recommended MRC use the findings from this focus group to assist in developing strategies for outreach to this community.
 - c. Several focus groups will be scheduled in the coming year.
- e) It was suggested that the first focus group be held in the Braintree office. Possible other sites are Boston and Cape Cod
- f) MRC should continue to focus on how to reach out effectively to these communities, including conducting outreach to local community agencies and organizations that serve ethnic and cultural minorities, among other methods.
- g) MRC should continue to consult its Bi-Lingual Committee for recommendations on how to reach out more to minority communities
- h) MRC has been successfully increasing its numbers in terms of Hispanic community and best practices in this area may also assist with outreach to the Asian community.

- i) Possible other outreach areas, are local public cable TV shows, targeting the underserved communities.
- j) Radio programs can also be included. Many in the languages of the particular group, we are trying to serve. Also reaching out to local non-profit organizations in the community.
- k) Having a presence at various functions such as conferences or community gatherings, with perhaps a booth distributing literature.
- l) The SRC Unserved/Underserved Committee should add reaching out to the Asian community to their agenda.
- m) Furthermore, it is recommended that the MRC's Diversity Committee, the SRC Needs Assessment Committee and Unserved/Underserved committee consider meeting jointly to come up with ideas for enhanced outreach to minority communities, including the Asian community.

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

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

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