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Policy Committee
600 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02111
April 1, 2020
11:00 a.m. -12:30 a.m.
Minutes

Attended: Naomi Goldberg, Inez Canada, Sarah Wiles, Kevin Goodwin, Sheryl Cruz, Olympia Stroud, Rosanna Woodmansee, Adam Garber, and Ronaldo Fujii.

The February minutes incorrectly stated that the April meeting would occur on April 2, 2021. The minutes were approved with that revision. The corrected version will be included with a copy of the April minutes. The Policy Committee did not meet in March.

The committee is currently focusing on the recommendation relative to procurement. The genesis of this recommendation was concern about potential delays in services for consumers who require a service that is not on the contract.

Adam Garber, North District Director attended the meeting to provide the committee with a better understanding of the procurement process. He answered questions and offered some suggestions on potential direction to take when working on this issue.

What is the general timeline and process for getting a new vendor approved in an instance in which a consumer identifies someone who can provide the service?

It depends on what the service is. In the case of something like purchasing supplies, a vendor agreement would be easily accomplished. In the case of purchasing tutors, there is an RFR process that must be followed. Some RFRs are always open, such as the RFR for tutors, while for other services like CIES the RFRs are only open at certain times. In the latter case, a vendor could not sign on until the RFR is open. In some cases this could be 7-8 years.

The RFR for tutoring is always open. It is a non-competitive process. Applicants fill out paperwork that is found on Commbuys. There is vetting through the contract department and there is a scoring process. It is possible that if a consumer is in need of tutoring quickly that the contract department could try to expedite the process, but it will still take time. The prequalification paperwork takes a few weeks then the applicants need to be scored. Commbuys does have a help desk to assist the applicants with understanding the paperwork and that process.

Purchasing medical services is also complicated because they have to reimburse using Medicaid rates, which are low. MRC's sister agencies have acknowledged this barrier and are trying to figure out creative ways to resolve it. Comparable benefits would always be considered before MRC would purchase medical services.

Reimbursing a consumer after the fact is problematic and is not necessarily an option in many instances as it creates issues with auditing and RSA does not like it. It would only be possible to reimburse for

DRAFT

something that is no more than four or five hundred dollars. This option would only be considered for very specific situations and the CFO would have to be involved.

In short, procurement is complicated and the steps to be taken when a vendor is not affiliated is going to depend on the particulars of the issue. The area offices need to be in touch with the contract department as these issues arise.

Services such as tutors and transportation are typically needed quickly. What can be done when there is no vendor to provide the service?

The best strategy is to plan ahead of time. For example, they should be planning ahead about how they can expand the pool of eligible tutors. The Business Improvement Partners and Area Directors are part of this strategy. MRC did have a lot of qualified tutors of different kinds at one point but when it was time to renew the RFR years later, many of the tutors were no longer available. They are considering things like connecting with the college disability services office that have access to tutors.

Does MRC cost share with other agencies?

Yes. MRC has an MOU with DDS. In the case of dually eligible consumers MRC would provide VR services and fund initial supports and DDS would pick up long term supports. They also have a similar arrangement with DMH. Comparable benefits would always be considered first.

Can a vendor be required to have access to translation services as part of an RFR?

The current RFR for CIES vendors addresses this by providing additional points in scoring if staff can speak other languages. In order to require all CIES vendors to pay for interpreter services the current RFR would have to be amended. This could happen at any time.

What is the benefit of being a state contractor vs. having a vending code?

MRC has statewide contracts. If there are statewide needs for a service, it should be put out in an RFR which would result in MRC entering into a master service agreement with providers that have that service.

It is helpful for MRC to know if there are specific categories of services that folks have trouble finding and if there are recommended priorities.

What is the process for getting feedback on CIES vendors?

Currently MRC receives informal feedback from consumers telling their VRC about their experiences and feedback through MRC surveys.

The SRC can begin asking questions about consumer satisfaction with providers. Currently there is no consumer satisfaction survey for providers. In order to introduce something like that we would have to amend the contracts. This is something that the committee could potentially do.

Rosanna relayed that there is a grant available for the patients she works with to purchase items that are not otherwise available to them. Each month there is a determination made to offer the grant to particular patients. She wonders whether MRC could establish some kind of fund that would be

DRAFT

available to consumers who need to purchase a service that isn't available. This would allow for easy transactions that could take place outside the regular process.

MRC can make incidental purchases when there is no time to procure services or goods in another way. This does create auditing issues, so it is not used frequently. There is not necessarily one person who is the decision maker. It is handled as a team approach within the fiscal contracts department.

How are vendors assessed?

There are various ways to assess vendors. CIES vendors have specific outcomes while Pre-ets outcomes are less concrete. BIPs meet quarterly. They review data both monthly and quarterly. They do site visits when it makes sense to do so but typically that is not the best way to evaluate although the providers do like them to come.

What opportunities do VRCs have to add to Master Service Agreements? For example, can vendors be required to utilize interpreter services/language line?

If it is not something stated in the RFR then it must be amended. Does this have to wait for the contract to end.

Are there work arounds? VRCs should be looking at which vendors have certain capabilities. A VRC might intersect with procurement process if there is a service they need and there appears to be a gap. They should be speaking to the Area Director who should be working with appropriate contacts within the agency.

VRCs are invited to quarterly contract reviews including staff from the Bi-lingual working group and staff who are deaf and hard of hearing are also invited. Similarly, a cross section of VRCs is gathered to draft RFRs and to evaluate responses.

The next meeting of the Policy Committee will be Thursday, May 6, 2021.