

August 17, 2023 minutes

Statewide Rehabilitation Council

Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee

1:00 – 2:00 pm

Attendees:

- SRC Members: Steve LaMaster (Committee Chair), Joe Bellil, Inez Canada, Naomi Goldberg, Christine Tosti
- MRC staff: William Allen, Amy Karr
- Public: Amelia Dillon

Meeting was held remotely.

Meeting called to order at 1:04 pm.

1. Introductions and announcements (as needed)

Members introduced themselves. Ms. Dillon introduced herself. She is the Director of Career Services for Open Sky.

- Agenda time of 2 hours is a max time. For the August meeting we have 60 minutes slated.
- MRC Consumer and Family Summit: Explore Possibility Sept 7th at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel & Conference Center.

2. Approval of April 2023 minutes

Mr. LaMaster called for a motion to approve the June 2023 minutes. Ms. Tosti motioned to approve the minutes. Ms. Goldberg seconded. Mr. LaMaster asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The June 2023 minutes were approved with no corrections.

3. Update: Recommendations and responses from MRC received back by Executive Committee for the August 1 meeting

MRC can choose to accept and work on a recommendation as written, work on a recommendation in amended form, or not work on a recommendation.

4. State Plan Recommendations Review and comments/suggested changes: FY 24 BEO Recommendations and MRC Feedback

Mr. LaMaster shared the MRC response document. (See **FY24 State Plan Rec and MRC Response - BEO August 2023.doc.**)

Recommendation FY24-4: MRC will work with the SRC to develop practical strategies for sharing work incentives information with the business community/employers.

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Employers who hire people with disabilities receive a tax credit towards the person's salary. Employers must be certified to receive this tax credit.

BEO will receive updates from MRC. How frequently? What updates do we want? How to make the information about tax credits broadly available? MRC already has employer partners signed up. The goal is for all Massachusetts employers to receive this information.

A member was not in favor of the revised recommendation and did not understand why MRC changed it the way they did. She felt MRC changed it from a collaboration to just supporting their marketing campaign. A marketing campaign means the spending of limited dollars that could go to other uses. Mr. LaMaster stated he shares concern about the unwarranted expenditure of limited funds. However, if private and public employers do not know there are incentives to hire people with disabilities, they will be reluctant to hire them. The BEO Committee does want MRC to have practical methods of sharing this information and does appreciate that MRC recognizes that a state agency cannot do a great job of getting the word out without assistance. Another member felt the recommendation is a benefit for persons with disabilities, that it will help them get work.

The committee was reminded about the process around recommendations. MRC has full control of how they will implement a recommendation. As an advisory council the SRC cannot force MRC to do certain things or not do certain things. Steve says the SRC serves at MRC's pleasure. Mr. Bellil said the SRC needs to get the response to MRC in September.

Action items:

- Propose that the Director of Financial Wellness attends BEO Committee meetings or sends reports for the meetings, regular bimonthly updates.
- Request the approximate cost of the marketing campaign.

Recommendation FY24-5: MRC will work with the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee of the SRC to analyze results of MRC Consumer, Employer, and Provider survey data to better align SRC Recommendations to relevant findings.

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

This recommendation came out of the interest the Department of Mental Health (DMH) had in knowing how the money DMH gives to MRC for employment services is used. Mr. LaMaster and Ms. Dillon served on the DMH subcommittee involved in this. DMH provides MRC with funds approximating the cost of having a DMH employment specialist. It was said that it was not DMH's job to provide employment services, but MRC's job. Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) are available through a partnership between MRC and DMH. The money from DMH to MRC goes to MRC leadership, vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRC), and providers. There was the assumption that less services were being provided because money was funneled. This led to MRC developing surveys so the findings could be shared with DMH. Mr. LaMaster and Ms. Dillon have participated in the survey development. The provider part of the survey has not yet been developed.

For the recipients of Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS), MRC did something different. ACCS is the single largest expenditure by DMH. ACCS provides more "care and feeding" before recipients receive a referral and while receiving services. A member stated that she hopes that giving recipients provider services results in diagnostic testing. Because DMH funds the delivery of ACCS services, a request to increase funds to provide diagnostic testing would have to go through DMH. Mr. LaMaster suggested that this member could join the State Mental Health Planning Council (SMHPC), and stated he would send this member a link about the SMHPC.

MRC proposed that this recommendation be combined with a Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee (CSNAC) recommendation regarding surveys. Mr. LaMaster has communicated with the Chair of that committee. Mr. LaMaster stated he can accept the language revision proposed by MRC but wants SRC to be involved in the survey development, and to continue with that involvement until the survey is complete. He wants to include that in the SRC response to MRC about this recommendation.

Recommendation FY24-6: Develop a Request for Response (RFR) to get three additional business consultants to advise consumers pursuing self-employment to achieve their vocational goal.

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Successful employment outcomes resulting in self-employment were higher in the Worcester and Greenfield MRC offices. Perhaps more consumers served by the Greenfield office lived in rural areas and were somewhat forced to seek self-employment. That did not explain the results from the Worcester office. Perhaps VR counselors there had taken specific training in self-employment. That is what MRC surmised. The BEO Committee brought in speaker Laysha Ostrow, who received a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) for a study about self-employment for people with mental health conditions.

MRC had said that VR counselors do not have self-employment specific training and there are not enough consumers seeking self-employment to justify providing VR counselors with much training. The BEO committee submitted the recommendation that MRC get additional business employment consultants through a Request for Response (RFR). MRC is not aware of the research the SRC and the BEO Committee have done regarding what MRC is currently doing. There are no VR counselors targeted for self-employment only. Based on how MRC wants to revise the language of the recommendation, it is possible that MRC does not understand what SRC has already done. It is not known if MRC gets regular reports from Mr. Allen about what is discussed in the BEO Committee meetings.

Mr. LaMaster asked for advice about how to word the SRC reply to the MRC response. It was suggested that the reply state that the SRC already knows what MRC is doing internally. MRC may believe the SRC is still in the research phase. Mr. LaMaster would be happy to send a more detailed reply to MRC. MRC lacks context about the information SRC has from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and the subcommittee discussion between Ms. Canada, Paula Euber and Ellie Starr. Notes of this discussion were sent to the SRC, and Mr. LaMaster also sent out an email. In his summary for the annual report, Mr. LaMaster had included that the BEO Committee has used a variety of methods to uncover knowledge and existing baseline and capacity for MRC. It was suggested that the reply remind MRC of that information, and that the SRC is asking for a specific strategy.

A member stated that she is uncomfortable with how MRC proposed to change the recommendation. Mr. LaMaster stated that as the SRC will continue to make recommendations while building relationships through collaboration with MRC. Sometimes the recommendations stick, sometimes they do not.

Once the reply is written it will go to the Executive Committee.

5. Open Mic

- The Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is hosting the Disability Employment Awareness Month Celebration Disability Event on October 5th at 11:00 am at the Massachusetts State House in the Great Hall of Flags. **(See Disability Event at Statehouse Hall of Flags - save the date.pdf.)** There will be awards to employers and at least one organization, and an opportunity to meet interested legislators.
- The Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) is giving three workshops on August 23rd and again in November. Can register at the MOD website. Mr. LaMaster stated he has begun forwarding notices to his clubhouses and employment specialists.

The next BEO meeting is on October 12th at 1:00 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:01 pm.