

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Meeting Minutes

December 16, 2021, 1-3pm EST

Please note: this meeting was held virtually.

Meeting was called to Order at 1:03pm by the Chair.

Ms. Biebel read the list of attendees from the Zoom participant list and Ms. Ryan recorded the names in the minutes.

Attendees:

- **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Inez Canada, Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Ellie Starr, Dawn Clark, Steve LaMaster, Rosanna Woodmansee, Ronaldo Fujii, Cheryl Scott (WIB), Olympia Stroud, Katie Queally, Paula Euber (VRC)
- **SRC Ex Officio Members:** Commissioner Toni Wolf, Deputy Commissioner Kate Biebel, Amanda Costa, Doug Mason, Kevin Goodwin, Liz Fancher (DDC), Sadie Simone (SILC)
- **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Manel Desvallons, Jacqueline Ryan, William Noone, William Allen, Graham Porell
- **Public:** Sarah Wiles (CAP), Coreen Brinckerhoff, William Henning, Health Management Associates: Ellen Breslin, Raisa Alam, Uma Ahluwalia, Taciana Ribiero-Saab and Doris Tolliver

Minutes Approval- *Ms. Canada*

- Ms. Canada called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. Goldberg motioned for approval of the minutes. Ms. Woodmansee seconded. Minutes were approved with no objections.

New Business:

MRC Commissioner Update- *Commissioner Wolf*

- VR Funding-
 - Commissioner Wolf shared that the VR funding for the remainder of FY22 as well as FY23 is stable.
- Fiscal Agility Project-
 - Commissioner Wolf and MRC Leadership felt the need for MRC managers and staff to have a better understanding of the fiscal process. This better understanding would allow managers/staff to be more accountable when it comes to budgets and know when money needs to be spent and when a freeze needs to happen. In the last 18 months, MRC has worked the Synergy consultants on a Fiscal Agility Project. This project has resulted in managers feeling much more comfortable with the budget process and fiscal terms. Additionally, managers are now receiving a monthly dashboard for each of their teams so they are able to make informed decisions. There has been a lot of positive feedback from staff.
- Innovation Grant-
 - MRC has been awarded an Innovation Grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Earlier this week, MRC held a 2-day planning retreat with 24 stakeholders to begin the first phase of the design process. The retreat attendees included a variety of stakeholders including MRC staff, consumers and state agency representatives. The grant will focus on VR specifically for individuals ages 18-30 and MRC needs to be serving that group of individuals by October 1, 2022.
- MRC Connect-

- MRC Connect is currently being rolled out in different VR offices across the Commonwealth. The goal is to have a full roll out across the agency in January. MRC will share that information with the SRC at a later date.
- Leases-
 - Commissioner Wolf reported that a number of MRC's leases have been up so MRC has been co-locating with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). In the new co-location sites, MRC and DTA will be able to expand their "Empower to Employ" partnership program. MRC will now be posting VR positions for the New Bedford, Malden, Pittsfield & Southbridge areas. The "Empower to Employ" project connects family members who have a disability with VR services as they come to DTA for assistance.

Commissioner Wolf Q&A Session- Moderators: Ronaldo Fujii & Ellie Starr

- Mr. Fujii thanked Commissioner Wolf for participating in the Q&A session and explained the process to attendees.
 - **Question 1: (Mr. Fujii)** – Since 2017, you have been serving as the commissioner for MRC. How would you compare VR services before you joined to VR services now? What were the major internal changes at MRC that you think account for the difference in VR service now?
 - Commissioner Wolf shared that when she joined MRC, there was an eligibility timeline of 60-90 days and then a processing time of an additional 60 days. Commissioner Wolf & MRC leadership immediately eliminated the processing time all together in 2017. Additionally, when Commissioner Wolf came to MRC, the agency was \$22.5 million in the hole. Commissioner Wolf shared that she is mindful that in that first year, many consumers felt that they were not getting all that they needed from MRC due to there not being enough dollars. Commissioner Wolf shared that it took about 18 months for MRC to get out of that debt which required a lot of internal controls, fiscal agility and \$6 million in VR funding from Secretary Sudders.
 - Commissioner Wolf shared that at the same time as the debt recovery and timeline adjustments, MRC entered a partnership with DMH. For many consumers, this was the first time that the conversation was focused on the "are you willing to start exploring the world of work" instead of "are you ready to work". These discussions have allowed for MRC/DMH to focus on pre-engagement where the consumer is the driving force in the decisions.
 - Additionally, MRC has been looking at its own stigma surrounding individuals with Substance Use Disorder. Historically, MRC had the tendency of not serving individuals until they went to treatment. We know that recovery is a journey and employment is a part of that journey so MRC has shifted to offer assistance to those in treatment as well as those not in treatment.
 - Lastly, Commissioner Wolf shared that MRC Connect is one the biggest transformations for MRC. MRC Connect is the new front door to the agency. Instead of every counselor doing eligibility interviews, there is one team who handles that process. This allows for consumers to access all MRC services at once. A number of VR offices have been rolled into the MRC Connect process as well as all Community Living offices.
 - **Question 2: (Ms. Starr)** – What is your biggest concern about MRC and how would you describe the future you see for MRC's VR services?

- Commissioner Wolf shared that MRC is looking at what the traditional VR model has been and what needs to evolve. As part of the Innovation Grant, MRC need to think differently about the way Consumers are served. It is about the evolving needs of the consumers. Commissioner Wolf flagged that it is an iterative process and MRC needs to be continually evaluating and improving practices.
- **Question 3: (Mr. Fujii)** – COVID was a major turning point for our lives with devastating consequences to many but also with positive changes in terms of how we approach work and carry our lives remotely. What are the changes in MRC from COVID that are meant to stay after COVID?
 - Commissioner Wolf flagged that as she speaks on this topic, she does not intend to take away the pain that COVID has caused for everyone but there have been enormous changes due to the pandemic. The pandemic required individuals to change even when they didn't think it was possible. Commissioner Wolf shared that the MRC workforce has historically been stable in their approach but this forced staff and consumers to pivot.
 - Commissioner Wolf shared that the use of technology alone has been a huge change for staff members and consumers. The reliance on technology forced individuals to think differently around the work. Additionally, Consumers have reported that the new technology has given them more opportunities when it comes to choose around their meeting style (i.e. – in office, virtual, in the community). Commissioner Wolf shared that MRC's technology acquisition project will continue for the remainder of this fiscal year. To date, MRC has distributed \$9 million in technology to consumers.
 - Lastly, Commissioner Wolf shared that the pandemic has required the workforce to adapt. This adaptation is an incredible opportunity for individuals with disabilities especially around access.
- **Question 4: (Ms. Starr)** – What are the top 3 ways that you think the SRC can add value to vocational rehabilitation?
 - Commissioner Wolf shared that in addition to the advisory capacity, it is about the doing. Commissioner Wolf flagged that it is not taking away the advisory responsibility but how can the SRC help MRC do more of the work. The SRC members are champions for MRC and Commissioner Wolf looks forward to working together to get the MRC story out there.

- The Chair thanked Commissioner Wolf for her participation and thanked the moderators for their work.
- The Chair noted that to provide maximum time for the presentation of the DEI Roadmap, the Committees submitted written reports which will be attached to the minutes. (See, **SRC Committee Reports for 12.16.2021**)

Presentation of SRC 5yr DEI Roadmap w/Q&A Health Management Associates: Ellen Breslin, Uma Ahluwalia, Doris Toliver & Taciana Ribeiro-Saab (See, **SRC DEI_Five-Year Roadmap_HMA_12.06.21_final accessible** for specific details.)

- The Chair kicked off the DEI 5yr Roadmap Presentation by introducing the work that the SRC has been doing with HMA since May 2021. The Chair shared that HMA has been providing guidance around how

to be intentional about DEI in the SRC space, with a focus on member recruitment and putting forth recommendations. The Chair also thanked the members of the DEI Working Group for their dedication and hard work.

- Chair Canada shared that MRC is creating a Diversity Council and there will be a seat on that council for a SRC member. The Chair asks that anyone who is interested in representing the SRC on that board please reach out to her via email.

DEI 5-Year Roadmap Presentation

- Doris Toliver of Health Management Associates kicked off the DEI presentation and shared the “SRC’s 5-year Roadmap to Practice and Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) 2021-2025” PowerPoint.
- **Meeting Objectives- *Doris Toliver (HMA)***
 - Doris Toliver (HMA) reviewed the meeting objectives & agenda.
 - Ms. Toliver shared that at the end of the presentation there will be a survey request of the SRC members. This survey will allow HMA & the SRC to collect important data.

Section 1: DEI In Practice & In Action

- **Prioritizing DEI: Why Race Must Be Prioritized - *Doris Toliver (HMA)***
 - Ms. Toliver presented the “Prioritize DEI: Why Race Must Be Prioritized” slide to the Council.
- **SRC’s Vision & Mission - *Doris Toliver (HMA)***
 - Ms. Toliver reviewed the SRC’s Vision & Mission slide. She flagged that HMA and the DEI Working Group has made some updates to the vision & mission to ensure that it was clear what the SRC should be working towards.
 - Ms. Toliver asked for volunteers to read the revised vision and mission.
 - Ronaldo Fujii read the vision for the group and Rosanna Woodmansee followed with the mission.
 - Ms. Toliver shared that the vision is viewed as aspirational and the mission is the way in which the SRC makes a unique contribution to achieving the vision in Massachusetts.

Section 2: SRC’s DEI Five Year Roadmap

- **The Final Report Structure: Three Components - *Ellen Breslin (HMA)***
 - Ellen Breslin of HMA began the roadmap presentation by reviewing the “Final Report Structure: Three Components” slide. Ms. Breslin shared that she wanted to review the three components of the report and the final report layout so that her colleagues can then go into the specific goals.
 - Five-Year Roadmap - Ms. Breslin shared that the SRC Working Group has developed 5 goals for infusing DEI into the SRC. Each goal also has the steps needed to reach said goal.
 - Dashboard: HMA has created a dashboard for the SRC which will contain 3 types of data. Ms. Breslin flagged that the dashboard is the SRC’s check-in to see if they are meeting their goals
 - Toolkit: The toolkit will house all strategies, trainings, articles etc.
 - Ms. Breslin then reviewed the “Presentation of the Five Goals” slide.
- **The Five Goals - *Uma Ahluwalia & Taciana Saab (HMA)***

- Ms. Ahluwalia present “The Five Goals” slide to the group. Ms. Ahluwalia shared that the first two goals are related to SRC Members and the last three goals are focused on VR Consumers. Ms. Ahluwalia then reviewed the slides for Goal 1 & Goal 2 to discuss goal intentions, objectives & strategies.
 - Goal 1: Establish Diverse Membership
 - Goal 2: Build Equity in the SRC Climate
 - Ms. Ahluwalia flagged the objectives for goal 2 will be phased in over the next 3 years.
- Ms. Ahluwalia then introduced Taciana Saab (HMA). Ms. Saab went on to review the slides for Goals 3-5 and shared the goal intentions, objectives & strategies.
 - Goal 3: Address Statewide Access to VR Services
 - Ms. Saab shared that SRC does need resources and staffing to meet this goal.
 - Goal 4: Engage with the Community
 - In response to Goals 3 & 4, an attendee offered to research and analyze data to help address some of these topics such as what communities have the most need. The data would be gathered from existing reports such as the U.S. Census.
 - Goal 5: Advance Employment Equity
 - Ms. Saab shared that since the passage of ADA, the employment rate of individuals with disabilities has remained stuck at 30%.
 - Ms. Flagged that it is not just about getting a consumer a job. It is also about providing the services and support to retain employment and help with career growth.
- **Other Dimensions: Data, Timeline, & Resources - Uma Ahluwalia (HMA)**
 - Ms. Ahluwalia reviewed the information regarding the implementation of the roadmap. Ms. Ahluwalia then turned it over to Cheryl Scott to discuss the SRC survey.

Section 3: SRC Member Survey

- **SRC’s Demographic Survey – Cheryl Scott (SRC)**
 - Ms. Scott presented on the background of the survey. Ms. Scott shared that this survey will be conducted annually to gather demographic data and measure goal progress. All information will be confidential and data will be grouped so no personal identifiers will be used.
- **SRC Survey – Stop the Clock for 5 minutes – Raisa Alam (HMA)**
 - Ms. Alam shared the survey link and reviewed the instructions to complete the survey. It is asked that only officially appointed SRC members complete the survey.
 - SRC members were given 5 minutes to complete their surveys.
 - Ms. Alam also shared that the survey would be emailed after the meeting for those not in attendance and for those who needed additional time.

Section 4: SRC Talkback

- **Discussion Questions – Doris Tolliver (HMA)**
 - Ms. Tolliver shared the “Discussion Questions” slide and asked for feedback from the group.
 - **Reflection Question #1 & #2 feedback:**
 - A participant shared that economic advantage/disadvantage should be included. Additionally, the participant flagged that the recommendation that race should be at the forefront of DEI is very important.

- Ms. Tolliver thanked the participant for their comments and flagged that a necessary part of the process is adapting the roadmap based on feedback.
- A participant flagged the importance of including immigration status. The participant flagged that immigration status may prevent some individuals with disabilities from receiving VR services.
- **Goal Question #3 feedback:**
 - A participant shared that they felt that the goals look great. The participant flagged that the focus now needs to be about integrating the DEI work into all areas of SRC. DEI should be woven into everything.
 - Another participant shared the importance of connecting the dots. A lot of data gathered by the federal government is focus on gender inequality and not all inequity.
 - A participant shared the importance of not losing sight of this information and ensuring that it is included in all of the work.
- **MRC Support Question #4 feedback:**
 - A participant shared that the SRC needs commitment and support from MRC. There needs to be more support and response. The participant shared that race needs to be number one when it comes to data. The current data does not reflect race at the forefront. The correct people need to be at the table in order to get the correct data collected.
 - A participant shared that the SRC needs to be prepared if the next Governor is not as committed to DEI as the current administration. There is a 5-year plan but it needs to be supported by the administration. This participant also flagged that importance of discussing institutional racism. Without acknowledging institutional racism, we can make no progress.
- **Hope Question #5 feedback:**
 - Ms. Tolliver shared that participants were listing the one word that describes their biggest hope for VR consumers in the chat. Participants listed:
 - Agency
 - Possibility
 - Empowered
 - Freedom
 - Accountability
 - Valued
 - Independence
 - Informed

The Chair thanked the HMA and SRC for their participation in today's presentation.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Fujii motioned to adjourn. Ms. Stroud seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:05pm.