

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

January 4, 2024

1:00 - 3:00 pm EST

Attendees:

- State Rehabilitation Council Members: Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Christine Tosti¹
- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff: Amanda Baczko, Kate Biebel, William Noone, Graham Porrell, Amy Karr
- Members of the public: Doug Mason

Absent Members: Steve LaMaster

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

Meeting was called to order at 1:03 pm by the chair.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chair Wood called for a motion to approve the December 2023 Executive Committee minutes. Mr. Bellil motioned to approve the minutes. Ms. Tosti seconded. Chair Wood asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. Ms. Tosti noted that on page 4 of the minutes, it should indicate that she *does* worry about Christianity being favored over other religions. The December 2023 Executive Committee minutes were approved with that one correction.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Request for Response (RFR) update – Kate Biebel

The intent is to finalize the contract with the vendor by next Wednesday, January 10th. Chair Wood, Ms. Biebel, and Ms. Baczko will meet to discuss how to work with the vendor.

b. MRC rebrand and updating recruitment materials – Amanda Baczko

MRC is still waiting for legislative approval for the name change. It is hoped that this will happen within the next few weeks. There will be a new logo to go along with the new name. There will be a sub-logo combining MassAbility with SRC. Colleen Casey can bring the new sub-logo to the SRC to get feedback. As part of the RFR, the vendor will probably create new orientation materials that will have the new sub-logo. It has been confirmed that the name Statewide Rehabilitation Council will not change.

The SRC web page is a subpage through the MRC website. The SRC website is being updated and will be presented to the SRC.

Last year the Policy Committee created fact sheets about MRC for consumers. Ms. Goldberg will forward those to Chair Wood, Ms. Baczko, and Ms. Karr. When working with the vendor, the first step will be to talk through all the existing materials.

¹ Upon request, members' names are used when they contribute to the discussion.

Ms. Tosti is uncomfortable with so few people being involved in the RFR process and work being done behind the scenes and not at meetings. She does not agree with the RFR at all. She feels that the wheel is being reinvented. There already was an RFR related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

Chair Wood noted that the vendor will review what the SRC already has. Chair Wood wants more education and orientation for new SRC Chairs. There was little orientation for members starting to serve on the SRC. It would be beneficial to educate new members quickly and to set expectations earlier so that they can contribute to the SRC effectively. The member orientation should include basics about VR. New members will be appointed to the SRC. Chair Wood appreciates Ms. Tosti's feedback and will keep the SRC updated on the process with the vendor.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Committee Reports

- **Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee – Steve LaMaster**

The committee last met on December 14th, 2023.

The date of the next BEO Committee meeting is February 14th at 1:00 pm.

- **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

There was no State Plan committee meeting in December. The committee last met on October 18th.

The next State Plan Committee is on meeting is February 21st at 11:00 am.

- **DEIA Council – Doug Mason**

The council last met on December 19th, 2023.

MRC is establishing a committee to prepare a report card on the DEIA council. Mr. Mason has been pushing for accountability and examining where the council is in relation to its year plan. Mr. Mason has been asked to join that committee.

The next meeting of the DEIA council will be on January 16th from 12-1:00 pm.

- **Policy Committee – Naomi Goldberg**

There were no Policy Committee meetings in October and December. The Policy Committee last met on August 1st.

The next Policy Committee meeting is on February 1st at 11:00 am.

- **Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee**

There were no CSNAC meetings in October and December. The committee last met on August 21st.

Ms. Tosti inquired about the status of appointing a new chair for the committee, since the previous chair, Ronaldo Fujii, has stepped down. She has been vocal that as a consumer she would like to be chair of the committee. Chair Wood stated that now that the holidays are over this will be a priority.

Mr. Porell provided information about the consumer experience survey at the December Quarterly meeting.

The date of the next CSNAC meeting is February 12th at 5:00 pm.

Questions/Comments for Chairs:

There were no additional questions or comments.

b. Discussion of questions for Pre-ETS presentation

It is hoped that Jessica Cimini will do a presentation about Pre-ETS at the March Quarterly meeting. Ms. Cimini supports Pre-ETS contracting work, as well as serving as an Area Director.

Pre-ETS services consist of:

- Job exploration and counseling
- Workplace readiness training
- Work-based learning experiences
- Counseling on post-secondary education or training
- Self-advocacy and peer mentoring

The following link was shared in the chat:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/pre-employment-transition-services-pre-ets-0>

Pre-ETS helps prepare students to receive MRC services or to do other things, such as entering college or the workforce. All students 14-21 with disabilities are eligible for Pre-ETS. Pre-ETS is for students actively in high school. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is for people over 18 with disabilities who have graduated high school or received a General Education Diploma (GED). Those in Pre-ETS will still need to apply for VR services upon graduation

Schools can refer students or individuals can refer themselves. Chapter 688 referrals are for any agencies for which a student may be eligible. A Chapter 688 referral lets the agency know to expect the individual will still need support after high school. At Chair Wood's school, they usually do directly apply through MRC.

A student gets connected to a VR counselor, who connects the student to appropriate vendors for things such as job shadowing, workshops, seminars, and job readiness groups. This is a supplement to school transition services. Students in Pre-ETS are not technically MRC clients; it is "light touch career exploration."

Ms. Tosti noted that some students may not have received diagnoses, so they or their families will not ask for these services and accommodations. There is a need to educate students about mental illness, disabilities, and accommodations. She is worried about students whose parents have not sought diagnoses and that Pre-ETS is not being provided equitably. MRC should focus on teaching educators about disabilities, so schools can catch disabilities not yet diagnosed and fewer students will fall through the cracks and miss the chance to receive these services.

This is why MRC does go into schools. Otherwise, the outcomes would be abysmal. Members are encouraged to advocate for the provision of more services through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and other agencies that influence school programs and curricula.

The SRC generated good questions about Pre-ETS at the December Quarterly meeting. Chair Wood read the questions:

- How are Pre-ETS services funded? Does the financing come from RSA, WIOA, other sources?
- More information about projected outcomes, how many participants proceed directly to work, how many do not need MRC services after high school and how many do. It would be beneficial to hear from providers about their outcomes.
- How does MRC control for quality among the various vendors providing Pre-ETS services? The quality of services provided can be variable, and depend on the vendor. What does MRC get as compared to what MRC expects?
- At the end of Pre-ETS, are the people who are eligible to receive MRC services in a better position to participate with MRC? Many people that age do not know what they wish to do. Does MRC collect statistics about this? It is reasonable to see if data is collected, to find out if there is evidence that Pre-ETS is actually saving money in the long term.

Chair Wood asked if anyone wanted to add to the list of questions to be addressed in the Pre-ETS presentation. No additional questions were added.

c. Open Mic

- Ms. Tosti feels it is important to know how public funds are actually being spent. The following link shows Commonwealth funding figures for FY24, including amounts for assistive technology and incarceration diversion funding.
<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2023/Chapter28>
- Ms. Tosti and Chair Wood are preparing a presentation for the February Executive Committee meeting. Many incarcerated people do have disabilities. Many people who would benefit from assistance such as Pre-ETS fall through the cracks, creating a school-to-prison pipeline. Part of the research involves looking at what other states are doing. Ms. Tosti is very excited. It is an important topic for DEIA and the SRC.
- Ms. Tosti is on a self-employment track with MRC. She loves free knowledge. Today she participated in a free workshop that she found herself. She shared the following link:
<https://www.msbdc.org/>

Chair Wood called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Ms. Goldberg. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bellil. The meeting was adjourned at 1:51 pm.