**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Executive Committee Meeting Minutes**

**June 6, 2024**

**1:00 - 3:00 pm EST**

**Attendees:**

* **State Rehabilitation Council Members:** Heather Wood (SRC Chair), Joe Bellil, Steve LaMaster
* **Massachusetts** **Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Amanda Baczko, Emily McCaffrey, William Noone, Amy Karr
* **Others present:** Doug Mason
* **National Association of Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA):** Jill Ferrington
* **Absent Executive Committee Members:** Dawn Clark, Naomi Goldberg

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

**The meeting was called to order at 1:04 pm by the Chair.**

**Introductions:** Chair Wood asked members and attendees to introduce themselves.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** The May Executive Committee minutes were not approved at this meeting.

**OLD BUSINESS**

1. Membership Update and Executive Order – Sahara Defensor

There was no Membership Update because Ms. Defensor could not attend the meeting.

1. NASHIA draft of Chair and Committee Chair tools – Jill Ferrington

Ms. Ferrington first shared the Remote Meeting Guidance document. **(See Remote Meeting Guidance DRAFT.docx.)** NASHIA is looking for input from the Executive Committee. Information was pulled from various sources. This is envisioned to help chairs run full SRC meetings and committee meetings. There were no questions or comments about the content.

Ms. Ferrington next shared a document containing suggestions for icebreakers. **(See Round Robin\_Icebreakers DRAFT.docx.)** This can be something in the toolbox for chairs. It is necessary to be mindful about when to use an icebreaker. Icebreakers are meant to be brief and not take up too much time. They are intended to help build collegiality, especially as new members join the SRC.

The final document deals with managing conflict in meetings. **(See Tips for managing conflict in meetings DRAFT.docx.)** It provides tips for how to respond to a potential disruption and redirect the meeting when necessary. Ms. Ferrington noted that members have expressed the need to be able to communicate in safe ways. During the presentation about revisions to the Bylaws later in this meeting, there will be further elaboration about public input at meetings, and about how to be welcoming and encouraging without allowing disruption.

It was noted that some public meetings specify at what times public input is welcome. While public input is important, perhaps each should have speaker a time limit and topics must be relevant to the meeting agenda. This will be explored further in the discussion of the Bylaws.

**NEW BUSINESS**

1. Review proposed revised Bylaws – Jill Ferrington

Ms. Ferrington shared the Bylaws crosswalk document. **(See Bylaws Review June 2024.docx.)**

Updates are being made to match the Federal regulations, to correspond to changes being made to the Executive Orders, and to reflect SRC aspirations regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

There was a discussion about the change that will lower the membership to “at least 15” from 21. The number 15 aligns with the federal regulations. While the wording is “at least,” the SRC will probably stick with 15 members. The SRC never managed to seat the 21 members the current Bylaws and Executive Order require. This does not preclude those interested from participating in the work of the SRC. Very little of the SRC work involves voting. Lowering the membership to match the Federal regulations is a way to help the SRC comply with the regulations. If in the future many people wish to be members, the Bylaws and number of members can be revisited.

Other changes mentioned:

* The term “Ex-officio” will only be used as it is used in the Federal regulations in the updated Bylaws.
* Language explicitly allowing members to serve in holdover status is being removed. However, the practice may continue as needed.
* Language was changed to indicate that the SRC can only recommend to the Governor that a member be removed. The SRC can decide through a vote whether to recommend to the Governor that a member be removed, but only the Governor can remove a member.
* The section on SRC officers was modified based on current practice. The office of Vice Chair was kept since it is a priority to fill that position. However, the SRC Chair can create more roles with majority support, so there is flexibility.
* The section about a Nomination Committee was removed and the procedure to nominate individuals as potential SRC officers was simplified.
* Language was modified to clarify that when calculating a quorum, vacancies are not included.
* Removed language about voting by mail or phone because that is not allowed by Open Meeting Law (OML).
* Added language verbatim from OML regarding voting, minutes and their approval periods, and retention of meeting materials.
* It was clarified that the SRC Chair can vote on any voting business, not just in the case of a tie.
* The section on parliamentary authority was removed from the Bylaws. Some of that language has been retained in procedure documentation.
* The number of votes needed to approve Bylaws amendments was changed from 2/3 of the quorum to a simple majority. The 2/3 figure stems from Robert’s Rules of Order; it is not from the Federal Regulations or OML.

Regarding public comments: OML states that the Chair can decide when public comments are allowed. Public comment can be allowed for one topic but not for another topic. One approach would be for the Chair to have the flexibility to decide if public comment will be allowed at the end of the presentation versus at the end of the meeting, depending on time constraints.

A suggestion was made for the SRC to consider hosting hearings, where the public is invited to attend. This could be an alternative to, or in addition to, public comment during formal SRC meetings. Ms. Ferrington said that during the preparation of the agenda for the June Quarterly meeting, we can further discuss public comments, and also the possibility of a pre-meeting before the Quarterly meeting.

There were no questions or comments regarding the Bylaws changes.

1. June Quarterly meeting preparation

# Review draft group agreements from the post Quarterly meeting survey

Ms. Ferrington shared a document listing potential group agreements. **(See MS SRC June EC Meeting - June SRC Quarterly Consideration.docx.)** The statements listed were the eight agreements that were chosen most frequently in the survey sent after the March Quarterly meeting. Ms. Ferrington asked the Executive Committee members for their perspectives and what, if any, action they would like to take for the June Quarterly meeting.

Concerns about specific statements:

* Statement #1: Ask clarifying questions

This is ambiguous. Can questions be asked at any time, or at particular times? Who may ask questions?

* Statement #2: Focus on common goals

Whose goals? There may be many goals.

* Statement #3: Clarify decision making process

What does this refer to? It could be explaining that the SRC will be voting on a particular topic, or the topic is being presented for informational purposes.

* Statement #7: Watch for power dynamics

Those running the meeting are the ones who are responsible for the power dynamics that occur. However, it was pointed out that people in different positions feel power dynamics differently.

* Statement #8: “Everyone gets to speak w/out debate.”

Does this refer to non-members as well as SRC members? The June Quarterly meeting is not necessarily the time to ask for outside voices. It is a business meeting, and some things must be accomplished. There was a suggestion to reframe this statement to something such as "the group will maximize opportunities for group feedback when relevant.” Another suggestion was to reword it to something that communicates that when a person speaks, they will not be harassed. An additional suggestion was to reword it to something such as “Respect individual speakers, ask questions at appropriate times.” There was also a suggestion to remove this one entirely because the intent is communicated to some extent by some of the other statements.

It was noted that a small number of statements, perhaps no more than eight, might be less overwhelming.

The decision was to table the discussion about the group agreements and revisit it at the August Executive Committee meeting.

# Pre-Quarterly prep/intro session

This was a recommendation from this group to hold a brief meeting before the start of the Quarterly meeting for newcomers to learn a bit about the SRC and the agenda for the meeting.

# Setting June Quarterly meeting agenda

Members were asked what they would like to hear about from the Commissioner and/or during MRC updates. Topics included:

* The state budget, MRC Connect, update about name change/rebranding.
* A request was made for the Commissioner to address the DEIA Scorecard.
* Any updates on interesting vocational outcomes, or new initiatives? Updates about Deloitte’s consulting work with MRC regarding self-employment.
* Pre-ETS update, including information about outcomes.

1. Committee Reports

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

The committee last met on February 8th, 2024. The April meeting was canceled.

The committee is following two FY24 recommendations. One is about the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC), and the other is about MRC’s efforts to improve its self-employment services.

The date of the next BEO Committee meeting is June 13th  at 1:00 pm.

* **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Council – Doug Mason**

The Council last met yesterday, June 5th.

The Executive Committee members received the DEIA scorecard in advance of this meeting. **(See DEIA Scorecard Updated.xls.)** It is a very comprehensive document. The DEIA Council prioritized three goals to focus on for 2024. These were determined by studies commissioned by MRC. Objectives were divided into domains and assigned performance indicators and targets for 2024. Mr. Mason encouraged everyone to look at the details. He invited anyone with questions to contact him.

* Membership Ad Hoc Committee – Jill Ferrington

Ms. Goldberg was absent from this meeting, so Ms. Ferrington presented this committee report.

The committee last met on May 22nd. Working on confirming what members are serving in what seats and the ending dates of their terms to clarify the open positions. A secondary goal is to learn with what organizations representing people of color or other underrepresented populations MRC has relationships, and also to learn what organizations MRC would like to have relationships with that it does not.

* **Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee (CSNAC) – Heather Wood**

The committee met on May 28th and received the results of the Consumer Experience Survey. It then met on June 3rd and discussed recommendations that may be made out of those results. The committee did not succeed in making a recommendation at that meeting.

The next CSNAC meeting is August 12th at 5:00 PM.

* **State Plan Committee – Joe Bellil**

The committee last met on April 17th.

At that meeting, discussed the possibility of the State Plan functions perhaps becoming part of the Policy Committee. The committee also reviewed the progress on the FY24 recommendations and the timeline for the FY25 recommendations.

The next State Plan Committee meeting was scheduled for June 19th but was canceled because June 19th is a holiday. The next State Plan Committee meeting will be on August 21st at 11:00 AM.

1. FY2025 recommendations – Joe Bellil

At this Executive Committee meeting, the FY25 recommendations will be discussed so they can be sent on for vote at the June Quarterly meeting. After that MRC has a month to respond to the recommendations.

Mr. Bellil created two draft recommendations. **(See State Plan Committee- draft recommendations.docx.)**

* The first was about consulting with MRC about restructuring the SRC committees. Mr. Bellil wanted to get that down as a recommendation.
* The second was about improving communication between MRC consumers and their VRCs.

Mr. Bellil asked that if committees are currently working on tasks, they try to write them as recommendations since the SRC’s job is to advise MRC. He does ask anyone creating a recommendation to answer the three questions about the recommendations that the SRC has established as part of the recommendation process. **(See SRC Recommendations Instructions.docx.)**

Mr. LaMaster shared his three recommendations**. (See BEO Committee- draft recommendations FY25.docx.)** The first two recommendations were continuations of the FY24 recommendations about the FY24 the DETC and self-employment.

The third recommendation is about gaining knowledge about the VR outcome of consumers with mental health disabilities. There is a new nationwide initiative to increase the awareness of best practices for mental health consumers, the single largest group of VR consumers. Mr. LaMaster would like to learn the outcome of this group compared to other disability groups in Massachusetts, and how this compares to what is seen in other states. He would like to propose this as a learning goal. He would like to discuss this offline with Ms. Baczko, Ms. Biebel, Mr. Allen, and Mr. Porell.

Additional discussion

Chair Wood noted that Mr. Mason had sent her an email suggesting recommendations about communication between consumers and vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) and also about VRCs and consumers communicating to catch problems in employment early. Mr. Mason said that Mr. Bellil’s communication recommendation covers his suggestion. Any committee can be assigned to the recommendation.

What do we know about the post-employment support MRC provides to consumers, and communication between the consumer, VRC, and employer? Does the SRC know enough about the current standard of practice? Maybe the SRC can gather baseline information about the current post-employment support provided, and then make recommendations to augment this.

The Consumer Experience Survey showed that a significant number of respondents were not happy with the services they received or did not see an upward trajectory in their area of employment. This may be a two-fold problem: 1) Maybe the consumer does not understand what MRC can and cannot do. 2) Maybe MRC does not understand what the consumer wants and/or needs. It may be interesting to explore why people are dissatisfied with VR services. At a CSNAC meeting, someone recommended a focus group with consumers and VRCs to talk about situations where there are disconnects. The SRC receives data but does not always know the factors behind the data. For example, with closed cases, we don’t know how many consumers found their own jobs and wanted their cases closed versus those whose cases were closed because MRC lost contact with them. Ms. Baczko said MRC does have this data.

Mr. LaMaster will get his recommendations to Mr. Bellil. Mr. Bellil will send all the recommendations to Ms. Karr by June 20th for distribution to the SRC before the June Quarterly meeting.

1. **Review** the FY25 SRC budget – Heather Wood

It was noted that American Sign Language (ASL) and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services would no longer be automatically provided at every Quarterly meeting; they will only be provided if requested in advance of a meeting. The possibility of having at least one hearing with ASL and CART was discussed.

Chair Wood will send the budget to members and will ask for responses to be sent to her directly, not to the entire membership. Her instructions will be explicit to ensure that there are no potential Open Meeting Law (OML) violations when people respond.

1. MRC Updates

Because of time constraints, there was no MRC update.

There is no July Executive Committee meeting. The next Executive Committee meeting is on August 1st, 2024 at 1:00 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 PM.