

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

May 5th, 2022

1:00-3:00pm EST

Attendees:

- Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members: Inez Canada, Naomi Goldberg, Joe Bellil, Olympia Stroud, Christine Tosti, Cheryl Scott, Steve LaMaster
- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff: Sahara Defensor, Amanda Baczko, Kate Biebel, Bill Noone
- Public: NONE

Please Note: This meeting was held remotely.

Meeting was called to order at by the Chair. Attendees introduced themselves verbally and in the chat.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chair Canada asked whether there were any corrections for the April 2022 meeting. A request for correction included:

- Adding the SRC member name, Christine Tosti, to her comment during the Open Meeting agenda item, where she acknowledged Autism Awareness Month

Ms. Canada called for a motion to approve the minutes with the noted correction. Mr. Bellil motioned to approve the April 2022 minutes. Ms. Goldberg seconded. The April 2022 minutes were approved with the correction.

SRC Budget: Chair Canada let the team know that a review of the proposed SRC annual budget will take place at the June SRC Quarterly meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Recommendations and State Plan Committee Report- Mr. Joe Bellil

- Two recommendations have been submitted from the State Plan Committee so far.
- There was a request by Mr. LaMaster to carry forward all three recommendations and goals from the previous fiscal year, that were previously held by the Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee.
- Mr. LaMaster expressed concern in addressing recommendations this early in the year, before having a chance to review the Needs Assessment materials.
- In the June Executive Committee, SRC Recommendations will be reviewed so we can vote on them during the June SRC Quarterly meeting. The recommendations will then be shared with MRC for their response.
- A question came up regarding the purpose of the recommendations, and if they will be used to inform the work of the SRC for the next fiscal year. Mr. Bellil clarified that the goal of these recommendations is to advise MRC, and to serve as objectives for SRC work in the coming year. Ms. Canada added that the recommendations can include all things relevant to better supporting consumers of vocational rehabilitation services, and

likely recommendations will be assigned to relevant SRC committees to help move the work forward.

- Ms. Canada clarified that a recommendation is not required in order to carry forward work in a Committee, but it's sometimes helpful to have a recommendation in order to solidify an active workplan.
- The group agreed to add a recommendation surrounding "hosting a joint forum with the Office of Individual and Family Engagement to promote the work of the SRC and gather consumer feedback." This recommendation will be overseen by the Executive Committee.
 - Ms. Stroud agreed to the proposal of formalizing this recommendation.
 - Ms. Goldberg suggested delaying a partnership on the forum until we have materials finalized for the SRC orientation. Ms. Baczko indicated that forums happen on a quarterly basis on a July/October/January/April, so supporting this recommendation later in the year would be feasible on the MRC side.

NEW BUSINESS

Committee Reports

- **DEIA Council: Chair Canada on behalf of Mr. Doug Mason**
 - Mr. Mason is out sick but shared an update with the Chair. MRC has a new DEI Manager at EOHHS, Ferdousi Faruque, who attended the last DEIA Council Meeting.
 - Mr. Mason noted some concerns about the amount of meeting time of the Council, as it seemed too short for the initial phase of the Council. He also expressed concern about not having anyone taking meeting notes. DEIA Chairs indicated they would discuss the concerns Mr. Mason raised with the group.
 - Additionally, the DEI-A council will support efforts to form a June event to honor the 30th year anniversary of the MRC Statewide Bilingual Group. The Council is gathering ideas for that event at this time.
- **Needs Assessment Committee: Ms. Olympia Stroud**
 - Ms. Baczko and Ms. Stroud will discuss next steps for the consumer experience survey, as well as any necessary recommendations for the committee surrounding the Consumer Experience Survey.
 - Ms. Stroud attended a meeting with the Downtown Boston VR Area Office, hosted by Vinnette McKay, Area Director. Ms. Stroud expressed how diverse the office was and that she felt comfortable being with them. She also expressed content with how needs of consumers were attended to by the Boston office.
 - Ms. Stroud highlighted the value of this committee reviewing the data from the consumer experience survey specifically for offices that have diverse representation like the Downtown Boston Office.
 - Ms. Stroud will be attending a meeting with the Roxbury Area Office at the end of May.
 - The next meeting for the Needs Assessment Committee will take place in June.
- **Policy Committee: Ms. Naomi Goldberg**

- The Committee has wrapped up work regarding making recommendations for MRC vendor procurement. The one area the Committee would like to informally monitor focuses on ensuring there is a priority for great language access with vendors. Jessica Cimini and Jack Houliker of MRC indicated the team was working to implement payment mechanisms and other mechanisms to increase language access within vendors.
- Two policy recommendations were provided for the State Plan.
 - The committee wants to review content for orientation materials for VR consumers. They are looking for MRC support but aren't sure if Communications is the right fit given the Policy Committee's focus is on language and not design. The Committee will need MRC's help with identifying the right person at the agency for this.
 - The other recommendation was around creating informational materials for VR consumers that explain the VR process in clear and understandable language. Ms. Biebel connected Ms. Goldberg to Colleen Casey, Director of MRC Communications as this would align well with Ms. Casey's current work. Ms. Biebel is going to re-review the request and circle back to Ms. Goldberg regarding next steps.
- **The Business & Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee: Mr. Steve LaMaster**
 - Tabled for the next meeting due to technical difficulties.
- **State Planning Committee: Mr. Joe Bellil**
 - The update for this committee was rolled into a prior agenda item, "Recommendations and State Plan Committee Report," under Old Business.

MRC Updates: Ms. Kate Biebel and Ms. Amanda Baczko

- **VR Operational & Service-Related Updates**
 - **Hybrid Model:**
 - i. MRC VR staff are currently working around 2 days per week on site, with continued conversations regarding hybrid scheduling.
 - ii. The MRC team has had VR Counselors tracking data to determine when and how (before 9am, after 5pm, virtually, in person) they are meeting with consumers to inform future state.
 - **Space Updates:**
 - i. The Taunton VR Area Office will be moving to the Department of Transition Assistance DTA office (next door). This is a continued effort to provide co-location with DTA. The current timeline for this to take place is end of 2022. The MRC Department of Protective Services will also be moving into that same space.
 - **Shifts in VR Leadership**
 - i. **Vacancies and Acting Directors-** we've had some Area Directors retire and had some recent promotions for Area Directors that have led to vacancies. Area Directors are made aware that they are often asked to take on leadership for more than one Area Office in the responsibilities of

this role. This coverage ensures consumers aren't negatively impacted. VR Operational Director, Jessica Cimini is overseeing these vacancies to ensure that no consumers are falling through the cracks. The vacancies that are being addressed across the State:

1. Lowell- John Person (*Fitchburg Area Director*)
2. Hyannis - Fabienne Renelien (*South District Director*)
3. Springfield- Ellen Spencer (*Former Worcester Area Director*)
4. Worcester- John (Jack) Houlker (*West District Business Improvement Partner*)
5. Plymouth- Julie Proud-Ray (*Braintree Area Director*)
6. Taunton- Joanna Sellstone (*Brockton Area Director*)
7. Malden (formerly Somerville) – Christina Ssekandi (*Salem Area Director*)

- **Consumer Newsletter & Disability Forum**

- **Newsletter:** MRC recently released a quarterly disability community newsletter focused on Brain Injury Services.
- **The last forum** for MRC took place on April 12th and was focused on brain injury services
- **The next forum** will be scheduled for July 12th, topic is to be determined, and Ms. Baczko welcomed any suggestions from SRC.

- **Innovation Grant Updates**

- **Programmatic Updates:**
 - i. First round of federal reporting was submitted on-time with no issues.
 - ii. Current work of the team is focused on the “participant flow” through NextGen Careers and has included significant young adult and family voice partnership in this work.
- **Staffing Updates:**
 - i. New NextGen Strategic Director – Michelle Banks – started April 19th.
 - ii. The team worked hard to build a Peer Mentorship role within this grant and are thinking how to leverage this new position across MRC as it's a first of its kind position.
 - iii. There has been a major hiring push in May and June for Next Gen roles, and we encourage SRC members to visit Mass Careers to review all current postings!

- **Questions**

- **With the vacancies in the MRC offices, how is MRC making sure consumers are not being negatively impacted?** Ms. Baczko restated the coverage protocols for vacancies and added the list to the chat. Ms. Biebel added that this is not new to MRC. The Agency has a reliable system to make sure consumers don't experience issues.

- **Can we add an update on relevant consumer complaints and themes arising from areas of Need from MRC Ombudsman?** Ms. Baczek will add this as a future agenda item for the MRC monthly updates.
- **Is there an update on the MRC annual Consumer Conference?** MRC will be hosting an upcoming consumer focused event on August 18th, 2022. Mr. Goodwin, SRC member, will be joining the conference planning committee. Ms. Baczek shared that anyone interested in supporting conference development from SRC can reach out to her to join the conference planning activities.
- **Is MRC collecting data about satisfaction regarding impact of office moves on consumers, and if data is being collected?** Right now, there's no strategic data surrounding office moves. However, AQA team is collecting consistent data around themes in entrance/exit of services, etc. Anecdotally, we aren't seeing significant changes in services access/engagement because of Office changes. If SRC is hearing of challenges related to Office moves, we encourage folks to reach out so we can think about how to collect data around that.
- **Are you asking attendees of the Quarterly Disability forum what they'd like to see as future topics for presentations?** Yes, we ask live during the meeting, and survey attendees to get feedback suggestions.

Developing SRC Policies: code of conduct and Handbook

- Ms. Canada provided context that to have a sustainable Council, we need to continue to document processes. The policy of focus for today's meeting is the SRC code of conduct, as currently the SRC does not have a policy around code of conduct. Ms. Canada noted that the MRC Deputy General Counsel will help draft these and she will attend Executive Committee meetings until these policies are finalized. Outreach has been made to the National SRC to see what policies, if any, other states have that we could work from. Ms. Canada provided some samples of policies and is looking for feedback from the Committee. Committee suggestions included:
 - The group needs a policy, but also needs procedures as well as a process to enforce the policy.
 - There are good examples of codes of conduct and other policies from the National Rehabilitation Association, and Association for Persons with Supported Employment.
 - A preference was shared to not call it a code of conduct.
 - This is a great opportunity to document the process for just like we did for generating recommendations and how that flows across committees such as general timeframes, so we have a reference point for members newer to the process.
 - A member liked the Pennsylvania council statement "Effective membership equals an effective council". It focuses more on what it takes for the SRC to be effective, rather than framing it from a punitive approach.

- A focus of a code of conduct should be on making meetings efficient, staying on topic to the agenda, ending early when the agenda items have been addressed.
- A concern was expressed regarding having too much documentation that could feel like an overly bureaucratic process for a new member. The preference is to have something that is short and simple, to ensure it's not overwhelming and does not create barriers to participation on the SRC.
- A question arose regarding what would the interplay be with this document and the bylaws? Clarity was provided that indicated bylaws are the legal obligations for the Council, and how we conduct business. Bylaws are written to define the authority of the Council and should be changed unless there is a change in legal structure. The policies outside of the bylaws are the guidelines for carrying out the authority and for doing the work. These should be reviewed often to ensure they still align with the mission and vision of the Council and updated as needed.
- A suggestion was made to frame the policy around what the basic responsibility of being a member is.
- A suggestion came up regarding setting up membership expectations, rather than using the term code of conduct, which focuses on building the expectations of a successful council environment.
- A question in the chat came up regarding a member's inability to provide feedback on the code of conduct as they were not added onto the agenda. Ms. Canada indicated that materials were sent in advance to all members, and that all SRC members have an open opportunity to speak up during these meetings, especially when agenda items are specifically aimed at seeking group feedback. Additionally, communication regarding this topic will continue in the June Executive Committee meeting, so members still have an opportunity to offer suggestions, comments, etc.
- Once we can get the basics written down, we present to the full SRC membership for feedback.

Open Mic:

- Ms. Tosti shared two documents in the chat, "Chart of Vocational Services" and "RSA-TAC-22-03."
- Ms. Canada shared that the chart is a good reference regarding the array of services that can be provided to consumers, with a reminder that Vocational Rehabilitation Services are individualized, and the counselor works with each client individually to determine services from the list that are necessary to achieve the client's employment goal.
- A question came up from Ms. Tosti regarding "how is it decided who does and doesn't get a service." Ms. Biebel clarified that this is done during meetings with VR Counselors and consumers on an individualized basis, considering many factors: their employment goal, financial eligibility, ongoing discussions between

staff and consumer, as well as a VR Counselors expertise in the labor market, employment skills, etc.

- RSA-TAC-22-03_Prohibition of financial needs tests for SSI/DI recipients was not discussed.
- The Chair requested that both documents be posted with the minutes.

Adjournment: The Chair called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Goldberg made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bellil. **The meeting adjourned at 2:38.**