

Policy Committee

600 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02111

April 7, 2022

11:00 AM -12:30 PM via Zoom

Minutes

Attendees: Liz Fancher, Sarah Wiles, Rosanna Woodmansee, Bill Noone, Christina Tosti, Kevin Goodwin

Minutes

February's minutes were posted and submitted with the meeting reminder. They were acknowledged with no revisions requested.

The recommendation relative to procurement is wrapping up. The committee acknowledges that this recommendation was made several years ago in response to several consumers having difficulty getting tutoring services. The recommendation was expanded and revised from there and carried over for several years.

The committee has spent extensive time learning about procurement, the existing barriers, and how those barriers may impact consumers seeking goods and services as part of moving forward with their individualized plans for employment (IPE). From there, the group chose a few areas of focus and continued to research these areas in hopes of being able to offer feedback to MRC about potential solutions. During this research, the group found that since the time the original recommendation was made, MRC has taken additional steps to address procurement related barriers with Business Improvement Partners and determined that we are not equipped to devise solutions to complicated procurement issues. Additionally, we are pleased to learn that there currently isn't a shortage of tutors, particularly with the potential to access tutors virtually.

The more recent focus of the committee relative to procurement was around increasing the capacity of CIES vendors to communicate with consumers in their native languages. As the group researched the matter, we learned what barriers

exist to ensuring that vendors can maintain bilingual staff and/or access translator services. In the February meeting, Jessica Cimini relayed that MRC is exploring different mechanisms for increasing language capacity with vendors and in the coming months would be determining what would work best.

Under the circumstances, the Policy Committee has determined that it has completed its active work on this recommendation. The group remains very interested in the language capacity issue, however, and will continue to monitor its progress. Jessica Cimini agreed to update the committee on this issue at a future meeting.

Next areas of focus

In the coming weeks, the State Plan Committee will be seeking input for new recommendations. Since the committee is sunsetting the procurement recommendation it will need a new area of focus. It is possible that members of the public or other SRC members will submit recommendations that are appropriate for this committee. That information will be available by the next meeting. The following are potential ideas that come from this committee.

Appeal Decisions and Hearing Officers

Federal regulations require both that MRC provide information to the SRC about fair hearing decisions and that the SRC assist MRC in obtaining qualified fair hearing officers to preside over fair hearings.

A fair hearing is a formal appeal process that consumers can use to dispute a decision that MRC makes about their vocational rehabilitation case.

The committee is aware that MRC is open to providing information on fair hearing decisions to the SRC but needs to follow up to discuss the particulars of how this information will be shared. Additionally, the committee needs to ask whether MRC would like the SRC to provide assistance in obtaining hearing officers.

This is potentially an issue on which the committee can focus in the coming year. The group agrees that this is an important issue.

Developing guidance for consumers

There was discussion about recommending that MRC provide easy to understand material/guidance for consumers that explains vocational rehabilitation and the process in basic terms. It was noted that many consumers are confused about how the service works and having informational materials available helps to manage expectations.

The next meeting of the Policy Committee will take place via Zoom on Thursday June 2, 2022.