

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Meeting Minutes

March 24th, 2022, 5-7pm EST

Please note: this meeting was held virtually.

Attendees:

- **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Inez Canada, Olympia Stroud, Ellie Starr, Joe Bellil, Naomi Goldberg, Christine Tosti, Steve LaMaster, Ronaldo Fujii, Cheryl Scott, Matthew Bander, Rosanna Woodmansee, Heather Wood, Rebecca Davis, Dawn Clark
- **SRC Ex Officio Members:** Commissioner Toni Wolf, Deputy Commissioner Kate Biebel, Amanda Costa, Doug Mason, Kevin Goodwin, Liz Fancher (DDC), Sadie Simone (SILC), Paula Euber (VRC Rep)
- **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Sahara Defensor, William Noone, Rachel Reyes, Jessica Cimini, Graham Porell, Bill Allen
- **Public:** Sarah Wiles (CAP), Mary Mahon-McCauley (MOD), Phil Hayes

New Business:

1. **Call to Order/Introductions**
 - a. Meeting was called to Order at 5:00pm by the Chair.
 - b. Ms. Biebel read the list of attendees from the Zoom participant list

Minutes Approval- *Ms. Canada*

2. **Reading of Mission Statement**
 - a. Chair Canada asked for a volunteer to read the current draft of the SRC Mission and Vision Statement; Ms. Wood read aloud the new Mission and Vision Statement for the SRC DEI 5yr Roadmap.
 - b. A final report of the DEI Roadmap from DEI Consultants, Health Management Associates, will be distributed to everyone in the coming weeks and updated on the SRC Website. The materials will include a new version of the updated SRC mission and vision.
3. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
 - a. 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 corrections.
4. **New Business**
 - a. Report from MRC Commissioner Toni Wolf
 - i. Next Gen Innovation Grant from Rehabilitation Services Administration-
 - Commissioner Wolf updated members on the \$16 million grant received by MRC to focus on innovative employment services for young adults 18-30 years old. The Commissioner request time on June SRC Quarterly meeting to highlights this grant and solicit feedback from the full SRC. The Chair noted this request.
 - The Next Gen team had a two-day retreat to discuss the design, and young adults with disabilities were at the table. Commissioner Wolf thanked the ILC's for their participation, and inclusion of many state agencies. The group

hosted a meaningful conversation about what's not working for young adults and how to change that. Traditional VR is not necessarily addressing the needs of today. In June, SRC members will receive a copy of the grant practice profile, so they can provide feedback

- Next Gen team has identified two Project Directors to lead the NextGen Grant. One will focus on internal operational needs and external community needs.
- The team is using creative outreach strategies to engage those we have not served or have not yet served well such as outreaching in communities and neighborhoods, partnerships with organizations.
- The home sites for service delivery are focusing on three areas: Springfield, Lowell and Roxbury (which includes Braintree, to support a focus on the AAPI community). The locations for the next gen grant was chosen because they highlighted work with underrepresented populations.
- The grant is using implementation science to frame this work. Part of that includes the vetting of a draft protocol to ensure we are addressing the important priorities. We will be engaging the family and disability lens by incorporating the MRC Family Partnership Coordinator (Manel Desvallons)
- Over 26 employment opportunities have been posted for this grant, and Ms. Biebel will be forwarding the current postings to share far and wide with anyone who may be interested.

ii. Branding and Marketing

- It's time to put a fresh face and language to MRC. We are working on a rebrand and new marketing materials. We are sharing marketing materials with MRC staff in April and have brought in a consultant to help us think about how we can help staff be ambassadors with this new language. We are intentionally rolling out marketing materials in nine languages all at the same time. Marketing materials can be shared during the June SRC meeting, and Commissioner hopes SRC members can be ambassadors using this new language and way of thought.
- MRC had hoped to change the name of the agency, and hosted focus groups with staff, consumers, and providers receiving feedback that the word rehabilitation, summarizing the message that "I'm not broken, I don't need to be rehabbed." The name has outlived itself. Due to a change in administration including a new Governor and new Secretary in January, we are going to wait to issue a new name. However, marketing materials will still move forward.

iii. Empower to Employ

- MRC developed a partnership with Department of Transitional Assistance, which included piloting four offices over the last year and a half to provide VR Counselors to partner with DTA and work with shared consumers. The benefit of this work has pushed the issue of inclusivity across state agencies. A lot of work has gone toward helping DTA support individuals with disabilities.
- The program was so successful that it has been expanded within the four co-locations

- Example of benefit- Commissioner went to see a DTA building, advocated for a wheelchair ramp to come to the front door rather than the back door. DTA hired a Disability Specialist to help change the paradigm of accessibility in their space and work.
- iv. Quarterly Listening and Learning Forums
- April 12th is the next listening and learning forum, from 4:30-6:30pm. Come join us for a focus on brain injury services and hear from survivors and their families.
- v. Operational Updates
- MRC staff returning to the Office two days a week on average
- vi. Questions for Commissioner:
- *Question- What MRC staff were referenced in Commissioner's report as supporting family and disability voice involvement in the Next Gen Grant?* Commissioner Wolf referenced involvement of Amanda Costa, Kate Biebel, Joan Phillips, Manel Desvallons.
 - *Question- What are the status of co-locations with DTA?* The initial DTA Southbridge location was not fully accessible. There was then a pause in moving in to ensure accessibility, for building access and additional accessibility needs. Discussions are occurring with state agencies about utilization of Universal Design principles. Ms. Reyes (MRC District Director) emphasized the priority to ensure building accessibility including automatic door openers, ramps, and other features. This occurred within the last two weeks.
 - *Question- For the Next Gen Grant, what is the total amount of funding over the course of five years?* Clarity was provided that the total amount was 16 million dollars, and the money has been given to MRC up front and will be spread across the five years of work.
- vii. Committee Reports
- **Policy Committee-Naomi Goldberg, Chair:** There has been no Policy Committee meeting since February. The committee has been studying the issue of a lack of vendors on the state contract for tutoring and other areas to come up with possible recommendations to improve the procurement process for vendors. The goal is to ensure commonly used vendors under CIES are able to fully support all consumers, including those whose native language is not English. We have no current findings but continue to work on that.
 - **Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment- Olympia Stroud, Chair:** The Needs Assessment Committee has been working with getting the new MRC consumer experience survey tool up and running. Hoping to start the next phase of this work in April, and the survey will focus on equity. AQA Staff at MRC, Bill Noone and Graham Porell, are going out to VR Area Offices to share with the Office about their data and what we know about the consumers they're serving. As a collaborative effort, Ms. Stroud attended the virtual visit of MRC Pittsfield to learn more about their work, and in coming months will be joining virtually in Boston and Roxbury Office presentation with the AQA staff. The goal is to let MRC know about SRC and that we are here for counselors and learn how SRC can be of support. The March 10th meeting

also discussed suggestions rather than recommendations to bring to MRC. Suggestions came from review old survey data. Suggestions were written up and will be shared with the SRC leadership in the near future.

- **Business Employment Committee- Steve LaMaster, Chair:** The Committee is receiving regular update from Bill Allen who is working with the Disability Employment Action Committee (DEAC). The DEAC consists of higher-level recruiters and managers across state agencies developing ways to increase the talent pool of individuals with disabilities working for the Commonwealth. Activities included a speed hiring event where individuals with disabilities had access to recruiters from different state agencies. The Individuals with disabilities submitted their resumes for review and pitched why they'd be a good fit for the roles currently open at the agencies. Based on Committee recommendations, MRC Employment Services Specialist, Bill Allen, created a 1-page guide on how to use Mass Careers to apply for state jobs. Additionally, the MRC Director of Communications, Colleen Casey, is working diligently with a consultant group, Think Argus, to conduct branding work. This work will include review and refinement of SRC materials to recruit individuals to the Council, to simplify our committee descriptions, and make the work of the SRC intelligible to the community. Cheryl Scott and Inez Canada met to identify a strategy and timeline for revision of the SRC Guidebook, per the recommendation of Ms. Casey.
- **Diversity, Equity Inclusion and Accessibility Council (Executive Committee) -** Doug Mason is currently serving on the MRC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility advisory Council as the SRC representative. Mr. Mason had questions about how serious MRC is as an agency about DEI. He shared how some organizations have DEI leadership and they are not provided the level of decision-making power necessary to make effective change. Mr. Mason is hoping to better understand how MRC will commit to this work as he continues in this role. He reminded the group that MRC brought in Bijoux Consulting for a SWOT Analysis in 2021 to host an extensive review of MRC as it relates to DEI and issued a report highlighting issues at the Agency. Mr. Mason is looking forward to continuing to work with MRC on efforts, providing updates to SRC Executive Committee meetings about the work, and referenced partnership with the EOHHS DEI Manager.
 - a. Commissioner Wolf notified the SRC that the DEI Manager resigned; the position is vacant, but EOHHS is hoping to fill.
 - b. A question came up regarding term limits for SRC and non-response from Governor's Office. Chair Canada provided clarity that this is an ongoing SRC concern that will be addressed later in the meeting. In short, people can serve until they are reappointed, replaced, or resign in writing. The question was tabled until the discussion of the Role of the SRC.
- **State Plan Committee report and Recommendations- Joe Bellil, Chair:** Recommendations for FY 2023 have been the focus of committee meetings in February. Mr. Bellil clarified that the committee develops SRC recommendations and shares them with MRC. The Committee developed a timeline for feedback, including input from various group (consumers, Committee Chairs, and the public). Input is provided from February until

April. State Plan posts the recommendations on our the SRC website and social media, and encouraged the SRC to send feedback through SRC email. Mr. Bellil encouraged new people to participate in this process if interested. The next State Plan committee meeting will take place on April 20th.

- **Committee Report Q&A and Comments**

- a. Comment: Ms. Stroud thanked Mr. Mason for his involvement in the DEI-A Council, and the importance of putting action behind the work with DEI initiatives.
- b. *Question: Does the DEI role sit solely within SRC, or does it make sense for Mr. Mason to participate in other diversity and equity groups?* Mr. Mason clarified that the amount of time he will need to dedicate to DEIA work with MRC it the maximize amount of time he can commit.

- viii. **Review of Proposed SRC Budget**

- Chair Canada reviewed a proposed SRC budget for the upcoming fiscal year
- A question came up seeking clarity regarding average income salary for the proposed administrative assistant. MRC staff shared that they are working on getting actual numbers from MRC working with Temp Agencies.

- ix. **Discussion of Role of Advisory Council with Q&A**

- Chair Canada went through the “**SRC Basics**” PPT provided in the meeting materials. The slides gave an overview of the advisory board scope and functions in general and the MA SRC, specifically. It also sought to clarify the role of members.
 - a. During the discussion of membership Chair Canada addressed the question regarding term limits for SRC. Members can serve in “hold over status” until they are reappointed, replaced, or resign in writing. **See, Slide 6.**
- The Chair led a discussion surrounding “What is Unique about your voice as a member of the SRC.” See, Slides 7-18. A summary of feedback shared included the following:
 - a. Community Rehabilitation Provider:
 - i. We have a unique voice. MRC projects a vision for what MRC consumers should get from VR services. Community Rehab Providers are charged with making those services a reality, manage the constraints and deal with wrinkles in vision, and extends to notable areas like questions about access to services, community provider has court side seat to that.
 - ii. Standards of quality- a number of community rehab providers deliver services in more than one MRC district or area. When those providers deliver services across a variety of districts, you see the microcultures and impact
 - iii. Community providers feel and hear pressure points from consumers
 - iv. Community providers has a unique perspective on access to services and how MRC gets to its goal
 - b. Disability Reps
 - i. We bring the background knowledge of a researcher and physician, professional expertise added to expertise of someone with mental illness, immigration experience, LGBTQI

- ii. Helping people like myself find work. Helping people like myself find jobs to go to and find the resources.
 - c. Client Assistant Program Rep
 - i. Disability organization that has focus on civil rights issues and have that at forefront
 - ii. CAP focus is advising on VR related issues, keeping SRC focus on role of advising VR. Providing feedback on VR issues
 - iii. Firsthand knowledge of what consumers going through the VR system experience
 - d. Business Industry and Labor Reps
 - i. Small Business Owner
 - 1. Lack of knowledge of the VR community, vocabulary, language, issues which brings a fresh perspective
 - 2. Experience of somebody who knows very little but has a big heart and cares deeply about the outcomes for people with disabilities
 - 3. Forces opening the dialogue so that it is more welcoming and more explanatory and changes the language
 - 4. Outside perspective, business connections, network.
 - ii. Business background is rehabilitation hospital setting. Working with people involved in all walks of life and the understanding that it can be a positive transition if you have right people there for you in the moment of need
 - 1. Experience working with people with traumatic events
 - 2. Hope, optimism, enthusiasm, lots of good will, extraordinary group of people, collaborative learning. Those attributes are as important as all the skills and knowledge
 - e. Chair Canada ended the discussion there and encouraged members to think about this question and submit answers to her or the SRC email: MRC.StateRehabCouncil@MassMail.State.MA.Us, so the PPT with the responses can be posted to the SRC website as a learning tool.
- The Chair opened the Q&A session to address questions from members that were submitted in advance of the meeting. General Counsel introductions occurred for Molly Karp, General and her recently hired Associate Counsel, Sahara Defensor. Ms. Karp relayed that they are available to answer questions about the scope of the council. Ms. Defensor can be an ongoing resource to SRC and will continue to build a relationship with the Council as the newest member of the team.
 - a. A question arose regarding **SRC Minutes and what should be included in minutes to comply with Open Meeting Law**. The existing rule for documenting meetings is that items put in the chat are not retained as a transcript. Meeting minutes captured live by the notetaker (currently Amanda Baczko) are what we would retain as the official record of the meeting. Items in the chat reflective of

material covered aloud may be incorporated into the written notes as they are deemed relevant to the agenda and SRC discussions.

- i. Suspension of Open Meeting provisions expires July 15th, new orders may come up regarding updated rules for hosting committees during a pandemic and within a hybrid environment.
- b. A question was posed regarding **how to get items on an agenda for SRC and other Committees**. We don't have a written policy, but we are trying to solidify some practices in writing moving forward. The established current practice is that if someone wants the item on the agenda, you should discuss with the Committee chair. For Quarterly SRC meetings, you should discuss with the current SRC Chair. We will let you know in writing if the item will be covered on the agenda and when. If you want to bring forth an item as a presentation, you should review with the Chair, especially if a monetary ask is involved. We also want to be mindful that we are using SRC time for SRC business. We want to make sure everything covered is within the scope of what SRC does to support vocational rehabilitation service delivery to consumers.
- c. A question was posed regarding **reporting of VR deaths**. There is an obligation on our staff to file death reports for consumers of community living. MRC has extended requirements to Vocational Rehabilitation to file death reports. Ms. Karp noted that this is not an agency priority and there are sources that report the numbers more quickly.
 - i. A question came up regarding the **intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status on death of VR consumers**. MRC doesn't have clean data for this. Some information is reflected in the death report forms. Forms are not necessarily timely, sometimes MRC staff are made aware of a death later in time through death certificates, as we are not providing day to day care for everyone served.
- d. A question regarding was raised as to **why classism is excluded from the SRC discussions around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**. A conversation was hosted in Executive committee regarding a five-year roadmap created by SRC. Health Management associates provided DEI training around how to prioritize race, as focusing on race will also embed ongoing discussions surrounding classism. The Chair encouraged members to read the HMA forward of why race is prioritized in the **"SRC 5-year DEI Roadmap."** Ms. Karp added that from a legal perspective, "income status" is not a protected class in under anti-discrimination laws, generally. The DEI-A council for MRC is also going to address these continued issues.
- e. Due to limited meeting time, some questions were not covered during the meeting. A document will be provided with responses to the additional questions.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Stroud motioned to adjourn. Mr. Fujii seconded.
Meeting was adjourned at 7:02pm.