

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Meeting Minutes

September 15th, 2022, 5-7pm EST

Please note: this meeting was held virtually.

Attendees:

- **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Inez Canada, Rosanna Woodmansee, Ronaldo Fujii, Joe Bellil, , Christine Tosti, Matthew Bander, Olympia Stroud, Ellie Starr, Katie Queally, Steve LaMaster, Dawn Clark, Heather Wood, Naomi Goldberg, Cheryl Scott
- **SRC Ex Officio Members:** Kate Biebel (MRC Deputy Commissioner), Kevin Goodwin, Doug Mason, Paula Euber (VRC), Sadie Simone (SILC)
- **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** Commissioner Toni Wolf, Amanda Baczko, Bill Noone, Jessica Cimini, Joan Phillips, Bill Allen
- **Public:** None

Old Business

1. **Call to Order/Introductions**
 - a. Meeting was called to Order at 5:02 pm by the Chair.
2. **Introductions:** Ms. Biebel read off the meeting participant.
3. **Reading Of the Mission Statement:** Ms. Goldberg read the SRC Mission and Vision Statement.
4. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
 - a. Ms. Canada called for a motion to approve the June 2022 Quarterly meeting minutes. Mr. Fujii motioned for approval of the minutes. Mr. Bellil seconded. Minutes were approved with no corrections.
5. **SRC Housekeeping (Quorum/Member participation; 5pm Meeting times; 2023 meeting format)**
 - a. **2023 Meeting Format-** Ms. Canada reminded the group that the state law allowing for virtual attendance at the meeting expires in March 2023. Discussions may need to take place. Ms. Biebel asked EOHHS about the likelihood that the law will be reversed and require in person attendance. The information shared was that it is highly unlikely that hybrid would be reversed as it's resulted in more community engagement and attendance.
 - b. **5pm meeting time-** seems to be working, but we are looking for feedback on this. Those in attendance verbally expressed that this time is still good as it does not conflict with work hours. An email will be circulated to the full SRC to gather input from those who could not attend.
 - c. **Quorum-** There have been former issues related to quorum, and we are looking to remind members to do their best to attend the quarterly meetings to ensure we can meet quorum when possible. The Chair reminded members that meeting dates are set out at the beginning of the year so that members have plenty of time to plan their attendance. This reminder will also be shared in an email to the full SRC. A question came up regarding whether ex-officio members can count if there was issue with meeting quorum, even if they don't vote. Unfortunately, the definition of quorum does not permit ex-officio members to be counted. Since quorum is not defined in the Executive Order for the SRC, quorum is defined by statute (a majority of the members constituted, which is 11 of the 21 SRC appointed members). Future considerations could include addressing the Executive Order that governs the SRC to propose a new definition of quorum.

New Business

6. Committee Reports:

- a. **State Plan Committee (Joe Bellil)**- The last meeting took place August 17th. The group reviewed MRC's responses to SRC FY23 Recommendations. Members started to draft a response to MRC's input. Chairs are working to review the drafted response with their Committees for input to send to the State Plan Committee by September 16th. There was also a review of the Annual Report and State Plan task timelines. Chairs are to have a first draft of their write ups for the 2022 SRC Annual Report by October 7th. Chairs were given the 2021 Annual report as a reference. The next meeting is October 12th at 11am.
- b. **Executive Committee (Inez Canada)**- we are in the process of bringing on an Administrative Assistant. We are now going through RSA for pre-approval of the SRC budget. We are also compiling policies and procedures in writing so members joining the council know what to expect. Ms. Baczko added that we are working with the MRC temp agency to bring on the Admin.
- c. **Needs Assessment Committee (Ronaldo Fujii)**- MRC provided an update on the survey questionnaire developed for consumer satisfaction during the last meeting. The Committee heard a presentation from Ms. Tosti on her life trajectory while living with disabilities and receiving vocational rehabilitation services. A few reminders were shared about National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the associated MRC activities happening in the coming months.
- d. **Policy Committee (Naomi Goldberg)**- The committee has been focused on two priorities, including the development of a set of orientation materials that can be used for new SRC members. The other recommendation focuses on creating a set of materials to recommend to MRC for use with its consumers. The materials would explain basic VR concepts like what's an IPE, etc.
- e. **Business Employment Opportunity (Steve LaMaster)**- The group incorporated Executive Committee feedback into the updated SRC recruitment materials. Updated materials were sent to the MRC Communication Division to produce media materials for SRC review.
- f. **MRC DEI-A Council Rep. (Doug Mason)**- The next DEI-A Council meeting is Tuesday September 20th. Mr. Mason has requested that SRC members submit any questions for the DEI-A Council the Monday prior to the next meeting, September 19th. On September 8th, Mr. Mason remotely participated in the first DEI-A council training session, which was 3.5 hours long. A lot of valuable and informative information was imparted to all who were in attendance. The meeting was moderated by William Cox and focused on diversity as it relates to our individual biases both known and unknown. Future training dates will be circulated to SRC members.

7. Explore Possibilities Summit-

- a. Mr. Goodwin provided an update regarding his experience planning for and attendance at the Explore Possibility Summit. He indicated a lot of people were satisfied with what the planning committee had developed for exhibitors and workshops. Mr. Goodwin participated in the mental health matters workshop, and found it was about mental health in all areas and in the workplace. Additionally, the workshop on promoting safety discussed resources and people to turn to when feeling unsafe and sent the message that individuals

- don't need to be afraid to reach out if they need help. A hotline was discussed that the State Police Detective Unit that you can use when needed. Mr. Goodwin didn't hear one piece of negative feedback. He wants to be on the planning committee for the next one.
- b. Mr. Fujii expressed how well organized and valuable the event was. Thanks were shared with MRC for providing such strong organization. Mr. Fujii expressed that he had not had much contact in the past with the cross-disability community, and found it helpful to connect with others, as well as all the services and offerings set up at the event, such as the artwork, headshots, and the keynote. It was an inspirational event for those looking to explore careers. The agenda was well built, and everything was perfectly done. Mr. Fujii suggested future consideration to have an SRC exhibit table at Summits to serve as an awareness and recruit mechanism for the Council.
 - c. Mr. Fujii provided a power point presentation summary of the event results, which were provided in the chat during the meeting and will be posted on the SRC website with the minutes for this meeting.
 - d. A suggestion came up to provide a designated space/room for SRC members at future Summits to meet each other and network, as well as providing support to SRC members to attend collaboratively, and addressing transportation needs for members.

8. MRC Updates, Presentations and Q&A

- a. Commissioner Wolf congratulated, SRC member, Cheryl Scott, for her work on the Mass Forward WIOA partnership meeting, today at the DCU center in Worcester. It was a two-day event that included, a gathering where Governor Baker and Secretary Acosta spoke, an awards ceremony for the MA workforce development partners across the Commonwealth, and the Quarterly Workforce Development Board meeting.
- b. The Explore Possibility Summit was amazing and kudos to all the planning Committee members for the spirit brought to planning. Commissioner Wolf shared that MRC received a comment that the event didn't even feel like the old MRC and encapsulated the new spirit the agency is working towards. MRC is working to determine if this will be an annual or bi-annual event.
- c. A question came up regarding re-allotment dollars and why MRC did not go after re-allotment dollars. In 2021, MRC had to revert \$4.3 million to RSA. MRC was not eligible to request re-allotment dollars because the agency sent back funds in the prior fiscal year. The reason for reverting dollars is due to pandemic; MRC is not yet back to pre-pandemic numbers, but we have seen a steady increase in consumers.
- d. MRC is working on ensuring our staff and counselors are meeting people in the community and providing remote options for flexibility. MRC has asked staff to submit data to address trends in services and where people are requesting to meet (in person vs. remote). We are now asking VR Counselors to come in 1 day per week to the Office, as we are seeing more Counselors entering the community to serve consumers. From October to March, we will be evaluating how this new schedule is looking, as well as walk-in traffic at MRC Offices.
- e. There is a lot of funding out in the State right now, including American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which MRC is using to support VR work. MRC has received \$19.4 million to support services. This will provide substantial support to MRC projects focused on assistive technology. Commissioner Wolf will provide a more detailed description of ARPA projects in future meetings.

- f. There have been some shifts in Area Director positions in VR. There are a lot of opportunities in state government. There is a lot of movement happening due to some promotional opportunities. Staff recruitment has been very challenging, and SRC membership was encouraged to talk to their networks about the many MRC job openings.
- i. There are 6 VR Area Director job openings. Worcester has now been filled, we are close to hiring in the Springfield Office, there is movement in the Lowell position.
 - ii. We are receiving internal and external interest in these positions. The number one goal this year at MRC is to stabilize the workforce and we are developing some creative problem solving as many job opportunities exist in the general workforce right now.
 - SRC suggested sharing a link to job openings so members can share through their networks.
- g. Commissioner Wolf noted that she has visited most area offices and the biggest challenge has been staffing vacancies.
- h. Next Gen Grant (Asst. Commissioner of VR, Joan Phillips) - we've been able to develop a new role, peer mentors at MRC, where people with lived experience are now a part of the team. We are also in the process of bringing in family partner positions which are new classifications for MRC and will help to enrich our workforce and bring an important perspective to the workforce. Next Gen is getting more and more exciting. We received an RSA grant to target young adults 18-30 underserved populations including individuals with intellectual disabilities, on the autism spectrum, and from minority communities. NextGen will focus on 3 regions: Worcester/Springfield, Boston Braintree Lawrence. We have hired 8 staff and engaged a curriculum which implement a self-cares model. Data collection and recruitment will begin October 1st.
- i. Questions & Comments
- i. Question: Given there is money on the table, at Spaulding Spinal Cord injury unit, there has been substantial issues getting ramps for folks. Is there anything possibility here for MRC supporting funding for this?
 - Answer: MRC has added significant dollars to Home Modifications, and the use of Assistive Technology is something MRC can possibly support. Commissioner Wolf asked the SRC member to reach out to schedule a detailed discussion.
 - ii. Comment: Comment in the chat regarding utilizing MRC funding for service dogs
 - Answer: MRC is open to considering needs of consumers, including service dogs. There are many ways we are trying to address consumer need, and staffing is one of them. There are counselor openings in the Berkshires and it's a current location priority to support. Additionally, the placement team is trying to help address hiring by organizing information sessions for our consumers to let them know about job opportunities at MRC.
 - iii. Comment: A comment came up regarding supporting MRC Consumer who are in poverty and who need additional support.
 - Answer: MRC indicated they have spent the highest maximum obligation per consumer this past fiscal year. Commissioner Wolf also referenced the importance of hearing the voice of the individual in services.

- iv. Question- In trying to bring in new employees, are MRC salaries commensurate with other organizations with similar openings?
 - Answer: A lot of our staff are Unionized, so salary negotiations are managed there. Manager position salaries are being looked at across The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). There were some compression issues happening where staff union increases happened, but manager increase did not. There have been issues with equitable salaries amongst state agencies which are being worked on.
- v. Question: Is there somewhere that outlines how much funding MRC has and spending restrictions for funding, as well as future planning
 - Answer: MRC does have a description of where funds are allocated, which should be provided on the MRC website. MRC will check if the dollar amounts have been addressed there.

9. Open Meeting:

- a. Star Market at Chestnut Hill is hiring if anyone is interested. Please let them know Matthew Bander referred you.
- b. December Quarterly meeting will include time to recognize and thank MRC Liaisons supporting the SRC and the work being done together. An email will be sent out to Council members to participate and/or volunteer for these activities. MRC also hosts a performance recognition program in December, and it could be an opportunity to combine efforts.
- c. Ms. Scott provided a thank you to the MRC team for their contribution and support for the Mass Forward convening. The event was a 2-day convening of workforce partners including MRC, as well as other partners and DTA, Job Corps, Mass Hire, etc. It was an amazing event with great keynote speakers, etc. All of which will be available on video. Thank you to Joan Phillips for a workshop on engaging employers, which was another hot topic of conversation.
- d. Spaulding Rehab -Charlestown is hosting a wheelchair skills outdoor event on Saturday, Sept. 17th. There will be exhibit booths available representing support groups, Assistive Technology, Personal Care Attendant (PCA) programs, MRC and more. MRC staff will be present with Ms. Woodmansee at the event.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Fujii. motioned to adjourn. Ms. Goldberg seconded.
Meeting was adjourned at 6:49pm.