**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**

**State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee Meeting Minutes**

**August 21st, 2024 11:00 – 12:30 pm EDT**

**Attendees:**

* **Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Joe Bellil (Committee Chair), Naomi Goldberg (Client Assistance Program – CAP)
* **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff:** William Noone, Amy Karr
* **Other individuals present:** Kevin Goodwin, Sarah Wiles (CAP)
* **Absent SRC Members:** Dawn Clark, Steve LaMaster

Please note: This meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 11:03 AM.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Bellil called on the attendees, and they introduced themselves.

1. Opportunity to share any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) thoughts and ideas

Mr. Bellil read the following and shared it in the chat:

Implementing Equitable AI in the WorkplaceMany organizations are using artificial intelligence (AI) to screen job candidates, streamline the application process and monitor employee actions. But when AI technologies are not designed or implemented with diverse users in mind, they can increase the risk of workplace discrimination, including for people with disabilities. The AI & Disability Inclusion Toolkit, developed by ODEP’s Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT), can help businesses mitigate discrimination and reduce bias in their AI technologies and learn how to make AI implementation more equitable<https://www.peatworks.org/ai-disability-inclusion-toolkit/>

1. Approval of minutes

Mr. Bellil called for a motion to approve the April 2024 minutes. Mr. Bellil asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The April 2024 minutes were approved with no corrections.

1. MRC response to FY25 recommendations

Mr. Bellil shared the document with the SRC’s FY25 recommendations and MRC’s response. **(See State Rehabilitation Council FY25 Recommendations\_MRC Response 7.31.24.)**

**FY25-1**

**The recommendation is to consult with MRC and to prepare a proposal to restructure the SRC committees by merging redundant ones, establishing distinct objectives, harnessing technology, and offering training to boost productivity and impact.**

**MRC response to FY25-1 recommendation**

This recommendation aligns with recent efforts (i.e., NASHIA consultative partnership) to develop strategies to ensure the work of the Council is effective and efficient to best support the productivity and impact of the SRC.

* MRC is supportive of this recommendation.

**FY25-2**

**This recommendation is for the SRC to collaborate with MRC to identify and report best practices in communicating with MRC consumers, while considering diverse individual cultures, languages, technological proficiencies, and social contexts throughout their engagement with the agency.**

**MRC response to FY25-2 recommendation**

MRC and the SRC are aligned regarding the importance and value of cultural competence and individual technology capacities in regard to communication and engagement with individuals served by the agency. Being culturally responsive is a core value of the agency, and there are many efforts afoot in this arena including, but not limited to, culturally driven agency-branding campaigns (e.g., youth and young adults, Asian population), celebrations of cultural heritage months, multi-language translation of electronic and printed collateral, and hiring of bi-lingual staff. MRC appreciates the SRC’s continued presence on our DEIA Council.

* MRC is supportive of a more targeted version of this recommendation that would include:
  + MRC providing an overview of DEIA work across the agency to SRC members, to help educate on current efforts and identify areas of meaningful partnership with the SRC. One area that the MRC could partner with the SRC on DEIA is in the review of in-development VR training modules.

Clarification was requested about what defined “communication and engagement.” Does it refer to MRC communicating specifics about its services and expectations? Or is it referring to being more attentive to culture and language? Mr. Bellil stated that he based this recommendation in part on emails from MRC consumers received in the SRC mailbox. These emails often demonstrate communication difficulties between consumers and their vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs). Consumers sometimes do not hear about all the resources they may be entitled to, or their VRCs are not communicating with them enough. He wants to see if there are any best practices other VR agencies use to communicate with their consumers and if there are ways MRC can improve their practices.

**FY25-3**

**This recommendation is for the SRC to work with the MRC to enhance engagement of Businesses and employed people with disabilities the in implementation of the Disability Employment Tax Credit.**

**MRC response to FY25-3 recommendation**

MRC has presented to the SRC on the Disability Employment Tax Credit a few times in FY24 and appreciates that the SRC continues to be invested in this important opportunity for individuals living with disabilities and their employers. For FY25 the MRC is most invested in continuing to build up the business side of the DETC, that is getting in front of employers and businesses to make sure they have awareness of this program.

* MRC is supportive of a more targeted version of this recommendation that would include further clarification of the term “enhanced engagement,” with an emphasis on supporting increased employer and business awareness of the DETC.

**FY25-4**

**This recommendation is for the SRC to work with the MRC to involve stakeholders such as self-employed people with disabilities and municipal Community/Economic Development Departments in the coming year’s efforts to analyze potential enhancements to support Job Seekers in pursuing self-employment vocational goals.**

**MRC response to FY25-4 recommendation**

The MRC appreciates the SRC’s continued interest in self-employment for the VR field. MRC’s commitment to further developing self-employment support capacity at the agency is evidenced by a FY24-funded RSA re-allotment project dedicated to developing and supporting the implementation of an Entrepreneurship/Self-Employment approach for VR individuals based on best practices. This work, headed up by Deloitte Consulting in partnership with MRC, has involved key stakeholders in the field.

* MRC is supportive of a more targeted version of this recommendation that focuses on a presentation on a future state self-employment strategy from MRC to the SRC at the completion of the Deloitte work (after October 1, 2024), followed by a discussion between the SRC and MRC regarding next steps and potential areas of support from the SRC.

**FY25-5**

**SRC will collaborate with MRC to identify and report national best practices in serving MRC consumers with Mental Health Disabilities, including differences in employment rates.**

**MRC response to the FY25-5 recommendation**

For the last several years, MRC has implemented a model of employment service delivery for Department of Mental Health Services ACCS service recipients. This model was developed in partnership with DMH and is built on best practices in mental health and employment service delivery, with awareness of pre-existing systems and supports to leverage. Our current model is still in early implementation, and as such we are not looking to modify our existing practices in this area.

* MRC is not supportive of this recommendation.
* MRC suggests presenting to the SRC current data on the partnership, employment outcomes, and the model, to increase awareness of the SRC on these MRC efforts.

MRC did not accept this recommendation. This was a recommendation from Mr. LaMaster and the Business Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee. There may be some more communication about this within the committee itself, but MRC is not supporting this recommendation.

The next step is for the SRC to send its response to MRC’s response. Mr. LaMaster and Mr. Bellil will do that.

1. Annual Report

The Policy Committee has not met this year. Mr. Bellil asked Ms. Goldberg whether she would be writing a piece about the committee for the Annual Report. It was mentioned that perhaps the Policy Committee’s status could be mentioned in the Executive Committee’s piece. This can be discussed at the September Executive Committee meeting. Ms. Goldberg said that she thinks the Policy Committee would convene if MRC asked it to review a policy or if a recommendation.

Mr. Bellil had attached a template for the committee Annual Reports with the materials for this meeting. **(See SRC Annual Report Recommendations Template State Plan Committee 2024.docx.)**

Dawn Clark told Mr. Bellil she would not be writing a report for the Consumer Satisfaction Needs Assessment Committee (CSNAC). Mr. Bellil will ask Heather Wood if she will write that report.

Mr. Bellil will talk about the Annual Report at the September 5th Executive Committee meeting.

Mr. Bellil shared the 2023 Annual Report. **(See SRC 2023 Annual Report.pdf.)**

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/mrc-2023-annual-report/download>

1. Other input from committee members

It is possible that the Executive Committee will perform the State Plan Committee functions in the future.

The next State Plan committee is scheduled for October 16th at 11:00 AM.

1. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:31 am.