

May 31, 2023 minutes

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee

Meeting Minutes

May 31, 2023, 11:00-12:30 pm EST

Attendees:

Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members: Christine Tosti, Naomi Goldberg, Steve LaMaster, Joe Bellil (Committee Chair), Inez Canada, Kevin Goodwin (Ex-Officio), Sarah Wiles (Ex-Officio)

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Staff: William Noone, William Allen, Graham Porrell, Amy Karr

Please note: This meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 11:02 AM.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Bellil stated the names of all attendees.

2. Opportunity to share any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility thoughts and ideas

Ms. Tosti has been advocating for disability accommodations for herself to obtain equal access.

Mr. Bellil asked Google's artificial intelligence (AI) Bard about Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) in relation to AI.

3. Approval of minutes

Mr. Bellil called for a motion to approve the April 2023 minutes. Mr. Goodwin motioned to approve the minutes. Mr. Bellil seconded. Mr. Bellil asked whether there were any corrections to the minutes. The April 2023 minutes were approved with no corrections.

4. Review the Schedule and Tasks for State Plan and Annual Reports- 2024- Note August 1st deadline for Annual Reports

Mr. Bellil displayed the Annual Report recommendations template created by Colleen Casey and COMS. He will email the template to the committee chairs. The recommendations are to be sent to Mr. Bellil by August 1st. On August 9th the Annual Report will be reviewed at the State Plan committee meeting.

5. Review and approve the SRC FY24 Recommendations draft.

Reviewed the recommendations today. Tomorrow, June 1st, at the Executive Committee meeting the recommendations will be reviewed and approved. They will then be presented at the full SRC Quarterly meeting on June 22nd for vote. On the next day the recommendations will be sent to MRC. At the August 9th State Plan committee meeting the committee will look at the MRC response to the recommendations in addition to reviewing the Annual Report recommendations.

It is important to understand which committee will work on which recommendations. Mr. Bellil wants feedback from the MRC Liaisons on the recommendations. Some current SRC members may not be members in the future to follow through. If something is not listed as a recommendation that does not mean a committee is not working on it in some way.

The committee discussed the recommendations the members had previously received. **(See Draft-SRC FY24 Recommendations- 5-24-23.docx.)** The wording of some of the recommendations was revised during the discussion of each recommendation. The recommendations listed below represent the wording agreed upon after the discussions. The committee responsible for each recommendation was also determined and is listed after the recommendation.

- **Recommend MRC reach out to the sheriff's department at the Worcester County Jail and House of Correction to explore outreach to individuals with disabilities using a dog training program and to get inmates' input on the program.**

SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

There was concern that inmates do not have access to state services such as MRC. By statute inmates have no access to VR services while incarcerated. However, Mr. Noone believes that a person in a pre-release program can access MRC to prepare for release. In the past VR counselors have been assigned to houses of correction. MRC previously had a brochure about how it serves ex-offenders. Mr. Allen noted that MRC has given presentations to the Worcester House of Corrections and state prisons. The discussion led to the recommendation being revised to the wording above, focusing on obtaining input from individuals in such dog training programs.

- **Recommend MRC analyze for accessibility the current ways people with disabilities give input and results from consumer needs survey.**

SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

The committee discussed the ways MRC currently hears from people with disabilities. These include the monthly forums, the consumer summit, consumer surveys, and the ombuds office. A member noted that MRC does not always make it easy for neurodivergent individuals to give input. The wording of the recommendation was revised to address the issue of accessibility and analysis of whether it can be improved.

- **Recommend MRC Counselors identify if a consumer is financially struggling and educate the consumer about possible resources and barriers to access these resources.**

SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

The original wording recommended educating MRC staff about financial privilege to facilitate discussions with consumers. During the discussion of this recommendation, it was noted that the SRC's function is to recommend how MRC can improve VR, and it was questioned whether telling consumers about financial privilege is the role of VR. A member noted that consumers may be ashamed to admit the level of their financial need and may not be aware of possible resources. The recommendation was revised to suggest identifying financially struggling consumers and informing them of possible resources available.

- **MRC will work with the SRC to develop practical strategies for sharing work incentives information with the business community/employers.**

SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

This recommendation was accepted as originally written.

- **MRC will work with the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee of the SRC to analyze results of MRC Consumer, Employer, and Provider survey data to better align SRC Recommendations to relevant findings.**

SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

This recommendation was accepted as originally written.

- **Develop a Request for Response (RFR) to get three additional business consultants to advise consumers pursuing self-employment to achieve their vocational goal.**

SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

This recommendation was accepted as originally written.

- **MRC will collaborate with SRC to identify, recruit, and engage more MRC consumers and stakeholders from specific backgrounds, groups, and organizations required by federal regulations, including Un-served/Under-served communities, individuals with disabilities, and businesses.**

SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

This recommendation was accepted as originally written. There was a discussion about approaching partner services and providers and partnering with Amanda Baczko about having SRC presence at the consumer summit, which will be held this year.

Mr. Bellil read the final wording of the above seven recommendations. The members agreed to them by consensus, with no comments or questions. Mr. Bellil will send the recommendations to the Executive Committee to be discussed at the June 1st meeting. Mr. Bellil did acknowledge his appreciation of the committee's input.

6. Other input from committee members

Mr. Noone informed the committee that MRC has begun the process of working with the Department of Labor to develop the next State Plan. There are new regulations that will need to be incorporated into the State Plan. One part is the registry of members of SRC, which will include information about what groups they represent, their seats, and their terms. This will help inform about the outreach and recruitment needed to obtain new SRC members. He requested the most updated version of the membership list and their terms. Mr. Porrell clarified that this is a new part of the State Plan. This will be due in the spring of 2024, but it has been started a year early.

Mr. Bellil thanked the attendees for their input and time.

The next State Plan meeting is August 3, 2023 at 11:00 am.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:29 pm.