



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for January 16, 2024, from 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)
Susan Tomasic (P)
Twana Jones (P)

Michelle Paonessa (P)
Jessica Keogh (P)

Julia Grant Barol (P)
Paul Fogle (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: James Whitonis, Chris Harbert, Audrey O'Connor, Ralph Roach

Guests Present: Ellen Strom, Chief Accessibility Officer, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Project Staff Present: Chris Todd, Michelle Gerrick

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Lynn Heitz called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic to approve today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Jessica Keogh seconded the motion. All were in favor.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

Discussion regarding Accessibility of Civil Service employment contact forms and application process

- Members explained that the application process for jobs within the Commonwealth can be challenging especially for people with disabilities due to concerns with

accessibility. Members inquired if there were any updates on efforts to improve the Commonwealth's application process.

- Ms. Ellen Strom explained that the Commonwealth is in the process of identifying the different teams they need to pull in to provide training for those involved in the process to ensure everything new is being built accessibly. Members explained that the 'contact us form' on the application website has some accessibility issues. When issues are brought to their attention their team goes through testing to recreate issues. More specific details are helpful to try to resolve issues such as what technology is being used or what browser is being used. They also try to identify what platform or 3rd party vendor would be involved and inform those developers to work together and resolve the issues. There are multiple issues that they encounter including training issues or the platform not being built accessibly. There are different aspects to a website. There is a template that is built by the developer and then there is the content that people enter. Different people fix the issue depending upon where the issue is found. Unfortunately, this is a slower process because of all the investigative work.
- Ms. Heitz explained that after submitting the application the interview and next steps are done through an online portal. She has been informed of many individuals that have missed out on job opportunities because they were not able to schedule the interview due to inaccessibility of the portal and online scheduling process. Based on what was described for the process to identify accessibility issues. By the time it could be resolved the individual has missed out on the employment opportunity. Inquired if someone in their office can simulate the process using a screen reader to identify glitches ahead of time.
- Ms. Strom explained that testing is a possibility and took notes on these concerns. Explained there is a phone number that could be used for scheduling to use until these processes can be improved. The goal is to get the system to where everyone can apply independently.
- Ms. Susan Tomasic agreed that they just want the same opportunities everyone else has without the need for someone else to have to provide assistance.
- Ms. Heitz explained the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) has been working with Ms. Strom for several years to inform her when they find issues that need to be corrected regarding accessibility. Ms. Strom has been very responsive especially regarding the voting system and the application process for accessibility placards.
- Ms. Strom explained that she is all about listening and identifying where the trouble spots are to get to a better place.

Discussion and updates for OVR Customer Satisfaction Survey process / return rates

- Members inquired if there were any updates on the OVR Customer Satisfaction Survey process and if response rates for the Surveys have increased. Members inquired if any of the suggestions provided by members in the past to improve response rates and the survey process have been implemented. Members inquired if the DSU or the SRC covered the cost of the surveys being handled by the third party marketing firm in Massachusetts. Members inquired if the Rehabilitation

Services Administration (RSA) provides the survey questions or if each state generates their own questions.

- Mr. Ralph Roach provided background on how the surveys are handled, sent out, and explained that there has been no significant increase to date in response rates which generally remain at less than 3% on average. Surveys sent to Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) average around 200 customers and around 1000 sent to Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) customers but those amounts can be much less as it varies from month to month. Feedback and comments included in responses are aggregated and followed up with by phone, email, and/or mailed letter. Reasons that response rates remain low are that surveys are sent out by email which are not as popular as they once were. Currently there is not capability to send surveys by text message. Massachusetts uses text messaging to send out surveys along with email follow up messages. Those recommendations have been shared with BVRS Director who is interested in seeing the Massachusetts model used in Pennsylvania. Massachusetts Designated State Unit (DSU) asked their State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to take on the Customer Surveys. They were able to procure the services of a marketing research firm that now handles administration of their survey process. Massachusetts response rate is at about 90% and survey customers from the beginning of the eligibility and throughout many stages of their experience with the VR office. The cost of the surveys may have been built into the budget of the Massachusetts SRC which then procured and manages the services as a vender of the State. Reports, presentation, OVR survey templates, and other presentations on the research conducted on other States' survey processes will be provided to the Committee along with contact information. Each State is free to generate their own questions. RSA provides guidelines on what information is to be collected on customer satisfaction. In the past PaRC did a great job in advising OVR on what questions are included in its surveys.
- Members agreed that it would be helpful to invite the person leading Massachusetts' satisfaction surveys to hold discussion during a Full Council meeting.

OVR updates

- Ms. Audrey O'Connor reported that the Audiological Policy is in the Public Comment stage which ends on February 16, 2024, which includes two virtual meetings on February 7th at 10AM and 3PM. Updates will be provided to the PaRC following the Public Comment period.
- Mr. James Whitonis reported that the State Board of VR voted to approve the State Plan on the week of January 10, 2024.

Schedule next meeting

- Committee members agreed to meet on Tuesday, February 27, 2024, from 3PM to 4PM.

Adjourn

MOTION was made by Ms. Jessica Keogh to adjourn. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.