



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for September 17, from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

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

Christie Cyktor (P)
Jessica Keogh (P)
William Paz De Melo (NP)

Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist (P)
Julianna Rodrigues (P)
Michelle Mitchell (P)

Ex-Officio Member Present: Julia Barol, Association of People Supporting Employment First

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

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 2:00 PM after quorum was established.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

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

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

OVR Updates

Discussion of Order of Selection (OOS) / Amending Description A, Financial Needs Test (FNT), Follow Up Regarding Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Interim Year 1 Report

- Mr. James Whitonis reported that the Rehabilitation Services Administration provided guidance that sections 4 and 5 of the State Plan would require amendments for the Order of Selection (OOS) to be reinstated. This includes Description (a) State Rehabilitation Council. Members held discussion on creating a new recommendation with the following language:
 - " 8. Federal flat funding of the national VR program.
Issue: In May of 2024, OVR was given late notification of federal flat funding of PY 2024, with PY 2025 also likely to be flat funded, resulting in a budgetary loss of approximately 13 million dollars for PY 2024. Although we previously commended OVR for opening the OOS, the Council does recognize the need to reinstate the OSS based on federal funding issues.
Recommendations/Measurable Goals:
1. OVR will reinstate the Order of Selection (OOS) as per 34 CFR § 361.36 of the Rehabilitation Act, for FFY 2025 to prioritize and ensure existing OVR customers in the Most Significant Disability category will receive services."
- Mr. Whitonis explained the OVR Executive Team will review and provide an OVR Response to the new Recommendation 8. Mr. Whitonis reported that Description (c) Order of Selection (OOS), of the State Plan will also be revised. The Council will be provided this language prior to the State Plan revision Public Comment period scheduled to begin by October 7, 2024. The State Plan revisions will also undergo a review process by RSA with the plan to implement the OOS in early 2025.

MOTION was made by Ms. Jessica Keogh to accept the State Rehabilitation Council's revision to the State Plan. Ms. Julianna Rodrigues seconded the motion. All were in favor.

- The Financial Needs Test (FNT) draft policy was forwarded to Full Council by Mr. Chris Harbert, OVR. FNT policy is currently in Public Comment period which ends on September 20, 2024. A final draft of the FNT policy will be shared with the PaRC Policy Committee prior to their next meeting for review. Ms. Lynn Heitz shared concerns regarding the timing of the Policy review which she explained requires approval from the Policy Committee, followed by approval of PaRC Executive Committee followed by approval of Full Council during the PaRC Quarterly meeting scheduled for November 13, 2024. This will be followed by review and approval of the State Board of VR during their Quarterly meeting scheduled in December 2024. Ms. Audrey O'Connor explained that she would provide the final draft to PaRC as soon as it is available and highlight any changes made to ensure revisions are made clear during the review and approval process.
- Ms. O'Connor reported that OVR has begun to review the Essential Procedures Policy for the VR Program.
- Mr. Whitonis reported that Temple University informed him that the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Year 1 Interim Report is 1 to 2 weeks from completion and could potentially be provided for review during the next Policy Committee meeting.

Goals / Recommendations for OVR Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- Ms. Lynn Heitz explained that the Policy Committee and the Transition Committee reviews OVR Customer Satisfaction Surveys which are provided to the Committees on a monthly basis. Members continue to discuss low or 0 response rates and provide OVR with recommendations to improve customer engagement and ensure the surveys are fully accessible. The Committee previously held discussion with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) regarding their successful survey process which involves a 3rd party vendor/marketing research firm that conducts the Massachusetts' VR Program Customer Satisfaction Surveys. Ms. Heitz requested staff send the MRC survey process information to the new Policy Committee members. Ms. Heitz explained there continues to be concerns with current accessibility and methodology of the surveys which are conducted by OVR and that she understands some OVR customers may be hesitant to share feedback or criticism within the surveys for fear of that affecting future services. Members discussed recommending that a 3rd party entity conduct the surveys and implementing the PaRC's commitment with Bender Consulting services to assist the Council with these goals and recommendations. Bender Consulting is part of the Council's Small Diverse Business requirement and is approved to provide services for the current Fiscal Year.
- Members discussed recommending the following goal and objectives:
 - Goal: Implementation of OVR Customer Satisfaction Surveys that improve customer engagement and that are accessible to all customers.
 - Objectives:
 - Investigate potential 3rd party entities with capabilities to successfully complete customer satisfaction surveys.
 - Develop protocols for entity to achieve based on PaRC recommendations.
 - Develop questions that the entity would ask customers.
 - Ensure the entity can conduct surveys in multiple languages, use sign language, video relay, Assistive Technology, etc.

MOTION was made by Ms. Susan Tomasic to recommend the stated goals and objectives for the Bender Consulting Services project. Ms. Julianna Rodrigues seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Schedule next meeting

- Members requested that staff poll for the next Committee meeting for the week of October 21, 2024, from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM.

Adjourn

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