

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**Strategic Plan to
Make Massachusetts a Model
Employer for People with Disabilities**

3rd Annual Report



December 2012

**Prepared by:
Massachusetts Taskforce on Employment for People with Disabilities**

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Introduction

The Model Employer Initiative was launched in June 2009. This report provides an update of our progress on implementation of the Strategic Plan to make Massachusetts a Model Employer for Persons with Disabilities. In this report, we will provide an overview of the challenges to implementing the strategic plan and successes achieved during this Phase II of the initiative.

Over-arching Goals and Objectives:

The Model Employer Initiative has three overarching goals:

- Seek to increase the number of people with disabilities employed within the Executive Branch;
- Explore methods to ensure the successful retention and promotion of state workers with disabilities and older workers who age into disability;
- Foster an environment and a workforce able to support and facilitate the employment of people with disabilities.

These goals will be realized through more than 25 objectives that were developed through the work of the **Massachusetts Taskforce on Employment for People with Disabilities** (“Taskforce”). Most efforts build upon existing human resource and talent management practices; some require innovation and the development of new procedures. All offer benefits to those current workers who are or may become disabled and to new workers with disabilities who will enter state employment.

During fiscal year 2012, the Task Force continued our efforts around several of the goals in our strategic implementation plan. The specific goals we focused on were:

- 1) Continue to increase and retain the number of people with disabilities employed by the Executive Branch
- 2) Continue to provide support to Executive Branch Agencies to provide Reasonable Accommodations through RACRA Funds
- 3) Continue to foster inclusion through the roll-out of the mandatory training for key stakeholder groups
- 4) Institutionalize the Model Employer effort into the infrastructure of State Government

Outcomes for FY2012:

1. Continue to increase and retain the number of people with disabilities employed by the Executive Branch

Increasing the representation of persons with disabilities in the Executive Branch continues to be a primary goal of this initiative.

We continued our efforts to increase awareness around self-identification and self-disclosure, through our annual Self-identification campaign. The Campaign designed to raise awareness of the various types of disabilities in the workplace and to increase the understanding of the self-identification process ran from October 4th to November 5th. During our third annual campaign we realized an increase of twenty-five additional employees who have self-identified.

In addition to the Self-identification campaign each agency was charged in the preparing of their Affirmative Action and Diversity Plans to include objectives regarding targeted outreach efforts to the disability community for filling vacancies. During FY2012 (1.01%) of new hires were self-identified as persons with disabilities.

Retention continues to be a priority, particularly during times of reductions. Since the start of the fiscal year 2012, we maintained overall representation between 2.8% - 2.9% for self-identified persons with disabilities; during this same time frame our managerial ranks ranged from 4.1% - 4.2%; and approximately 2.1% of all executive branch promotions self-identified persons with disabilities.

Our ability to retain and promote members of this valued workforce demographic during challenging times demonstrates the Commonwealth's continued commitment to the Model Employer Initiative.

2. Continue to provide support to Executive Branch Agencies to provide Reasonable Accommodations through RACRA Funds.

The Massachusetts Office on Disability and the Office of Access and Opportunity continued to administer the Reasonable Accommodation Capital Reserve Account, which is the backstop for agencies that find they are having difficulty funding the more expensive reasonable accommodation requests made by employees with disabilities.

Applications continue to be addressed on a first come first serve basis. Four agencies completed RACRA funds requests in FY 2012. All four agency requests were funded in

full. Grants ranging from \$669.99 to \$50,000 served **6,018*** executive branch employees.

Table of Awards for FY 2012

Agency	Secretariat	Individuals Served	Request	Approved
Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity	ANF	6,000	\$669.99	\$669.99
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission	HHS	7	\$7,200.00	\$7,200.00
Massachusetts Office on Disability	ANF	2	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00
Bureau of State Office Buildings	ANF	9	\$32,204.00	\$32,204.00
Total		6,018	\$90,073.99	\$90,073.99

**NOTE: The number of employees with disabilities served cannot be accurately determined due to the unique nature of one requestor. The Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity was approved for technology that enabled it to deliver a “Disability Awareness” training program to all Executive Branch employees. The training teaches employees about their rights and the opportunity to ask for a reasonable accommodation, and it ensures that managers have a better understanding of how to address the reasonable accommodation process with their employees. The training program will serve at least 6,000 people, many of whom are undoubtedly persons with disabilities.*

Findings

- Three of the four funding requests related to technology. Although this was an approved category for funding and consistent with past funding awards, the RACRA is available for many other types of workplace accommodations.
- The real cost of technology accommodations often includes the need to upgrade core systems and infrastructure to ensure accessibility and compatibility.
- Information Technology Consolidation and Human Resources Modernization Initiatives within the Executive Branch (MassHR) will trigger a need for better coordination of agency resources, and possibly a need for additional resources, to meet accessibility requirements. Absent such coordination, agencies may turn to the RACRA to meet needs.
- Employees with newly adapted systems most often need training to maximize the Commonwealth’s investment in adaptive technology. The current RACRA structure does not address this situation.
- During the course of the year it was learned the RACRA form on the MOD website was not accessible to people who use screen readers. The form was reformatted and is now accessible.

Recommendations

- Monitor IT Consolidation and HR Modernization efforts to identify whether the RACRA policy should be amended to specifically address infrastructure needs within agencies and Executive Department-wide.
- Training needs should be specifically addressed.
- Explore why only four agencies applied for funding consistent with the RACRA's purpose. Re-emphasize to agencies the role and scope of the RACRA as a resource for meeting reasonable accommodation responsibilities.
- Continue to outreach to Secretaries, Agency Heads and ADA Coordinators reminding them of the availability of RACRA.
- Implement the Information Technology Accessibility Roadmap. Implementation should have a direct benefit to achieving accessibility in IT systems and should complement our Model Employer efforts.

3. Continue to foster inclusion through the roll-out of the mandatory training for key stakeholder groups

Our work with Cultural Coach International, and HRD's Training and Learning Development Group continued as we finalized curriculums for our three stakeholder groups (employees, managers and ADA Coordinators) on ***Disability Awareness***.

We rolled out the Diversity Part II - Disability Awareness, e-Learning (employees) on September 19, 2011; followed closely by the managers' half-day classroom training which we launched on October 3, 2011.

We also offered (4) train-the-trainer sessions to ensure we had bench strength to deliver the classroom training for our managers. In addition, we provided three senior manager and two ADA Coordinator trainings. All the trainings were mandatory to ensure our workforce had the tools they needed to be successful in fully implementing our Model Employer Initiative.

Since the launch of the Diversity Part II- Disability Awareness trainings, **17,745 (40%)** of employees have completed the eLearning and we have trained **1614 (43%)** of the executive branch managers. Our target dates for 100% compliance are December 28, 2012 for eLearning (all employees) and February 28, 2013 for the half-day classroom training (Managers). Based on course evaluations the customer satisfaction level is very high and the training is being embraced by our workforce.

4. Institutionalize the Model Employer effort into the infrastructure of State Government

In January 2012, the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity with assistance from Office of Access and Opportunity assumed full responsibility for the production of

Dialogue, the quarterly newsletter. The newsletter is distributed electronically to the entire executive branch, approximately 44,000 employees. Copies of the newsletter are also made available in alternate formats. Current and past issues are maintained on our intra-net site for easy access.

The newsletter provides key information as well as feature stories on important disability news items, some of the topics this past fiscal year included:

- ***The BIG Event/Segway's***
- ***Assistive Technology: Changing People's Lives***
- ***The Employment Process and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals- Part I / Part II***

Dialogue, continues to be a key source for information on the progress the Commonwealth is making in its journey to becoming a Model Employer. Based on the feedback we receive, we know the distribution of the newsletter is making an impact and raising awareness around vital disability issues. In addition, it provides employees and managers with a ready resource to contact regarding issues or concerns they may have or want to raise.

Continuing our commitment to institutionalize the Model Employer initiative, we partnered with Mass HR Accessibility Advisory Group and Mass Office on Disability to offer recommendations to mitigate and/or eliminate accessibility impact of migration to Self-Service Time and Attendance. The Mass HR Accessibility Advisory Group continues to meet on an as needed basis to ensure an accessible and smooth implementation Self-Service Time and Attendance.

Moving Forward: *Specific goals for FY2013 include:*

1. Continue our efforts to achieve 100% compliance with Diversity Part II – Disability Awareness Training.
2. Continue to implement strategies to institutionalize the Model Employer effort such that the effort becomes standard administrative practice.
3. Information Technology - Convening a “Super Users” Group to **explore** such areas as:
 - a. Accessibility/Security concerns
 - b. Getting things Standardized/Pass “Fire Walls”
 - c. Videos
 - d. Skype - tools to help individuals with disabilities do their jobs
 - e. You Tube – tools to help individuals with disabilities do their jobs
4. Maintain emphasis upon offering Flexibility/Accommodations in the workplace.
5. Create a central repository for adaptive equipment and Reasonable Accommodation Services.

Acknowledgement:

This initiative continues as a collaborative effort across executive branch agencies and is co-chaired by Sandra Borders, Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) and Myra Berloff, Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD), current group members includes:

- *Executive Office of Administration and Finance (ANF), Office of Access and Opportunity (OAO), Ronald Marlow, and Maria Gonzalez*
- *Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Christine Griffin, Sonia Bryan and Quoc Tran*
- *Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Mary K. Browne*
- *Human Resources Division (HRD), Michele Heffernan*
- *Massachusetts Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH), Edgar Herrera and*
- *Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), Charles Carr*