

# Dialogue



*The newsletter of the Human Resources Division, Summer 2013*

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## Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

**Making a difference in Massachusetts**

Getting people with significant disabilities good competitive, integrated employment with good wages! ~ Charles Carr, Commissioner

National data indicates a disturbing trend of unemployment among individuals with disabilities. One recent report states that: more than two thirds of Americans with disabilities are without a job, and adults with disabilities are leaving the labor force during this recession at more than 10 times the rate of adults without disabilities.

As the country experiences economic crisis Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) continues to implement innovative business strategies to develop and strengthen employer relationships and improve successful employment outcomes for its consumers. During fiscal year 2013, thanks to the hard work of our dedicated staff and strategies implemented, MRC assisted **3509** consumers in obtaining and maintaining employment. This represents 106% of the state fiscal year goal. Here are a few of the strategies that contributed to this success:

### **Strengthening Employer Relationships:**

This strategy includes the realignment and enhancement of our job placement services with the hiring of a new category of staff "Employment Service Specialists" (ESS). These Employment Service Specialists (ESS), experienced in sales, marketing and management are now a part of MRC's placement team and serve to augment the work of our Placement Specialists and Counselors in providing placement services to our consumers.



The Commonwealth: Working to be a Model Employer

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Strategically placed across the state, ESS's develop employer relationships, identifying hidden jobs in growth industries and managing employer accounts. Employer accounts are most valuable in the overall employer engagement strategy.

Here are some hi-lights of a few of our successes with our newly developed employer accounts during FY 2013.

- *Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program (OFCCP):* MRC in collaboration with OFCCP held a hiring event in March 2013 which resulted in 65 consumers hired into competitive employment and 10 new employer accounts.
- *Manpower:* 22 consumers hired
- *Spaulding Rehabilitation Network/Working Partners Program:* 18 consumers hired and 7 individuals participated in a volunteer experience
- *Enterprise Holdings:* 13 hires
- *CVS Caremark:* 12 hires into pharmacy technician positions
- *Allied Barton Security Services:* 12 consumers hired
- *LaundroMax:* 12 hires
- *Lowe's:* 12 hires
- *Bay Cove Human Services:* 9 hires
- *Securitas:* 6 hires

### **On-The-Job-Training Initiative:**

Through this initiative MRC provides employers with funds to offset training costs for new hires. Employers have the opportunity to evaluate the skills of the new hire at little or no cost to the company during a negotiated training period and at a negotiated cost. If at the end of the training, the employer is satisfied, the company has a trained employee ready to help with the business needs. On average, over 60% of consumers who participate in an On-the-Job Training opportunity obtain employment with the training employer while others obtain employment elsewhere simply because of the training experience.

### **Youth Transition Initiative:**

We've strategically positioned vocational rehabilitation counselors in all public high schools so that students with disabilities leaving high school can receive the guidance and vocational support needed during their junior and senior years to position themselves for post secondary education and employment after graduation. As a result, our services to transitions students have increased by over 60% in the past five years.



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In addition, we are preparing youth for employment by providing them with early exposure to the world of work. One such example is MRC's participation in the Governor's State as a Model Employer Initiative through which high school seniors with disabilities are offered the opportunity to participate in paid summer internships at various State agencies across the commonwealth. Twenty Five to thirty students participate in this initiative annually.

### **Car Donation Program:**

In cooperation with the Good News Garage- Lutheran Social Services, Inc. (GNG), the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) has for several years, provided refurbished donated vehicles to eligible consumers who otherwise could not afford the cost of purchase. Annually MRC assists 50 - 60 individuals who reside in rural areas in obtaining transportation to get back and forth to work.

### **Web Based Case Management System:**

On November 19, 2012 MRC instituted its long awaited web based caseload management system. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Information System (MRCIS) is a comprehensive caseload management system that is a web based application designed to be used either in the local area office or at a community location more convenient to the consumer. This will allow the counselors more mobility, and bring the agency closer to a paperless system. Although MRC has had an electronic caseload information and management system for many years, that system co-existed with physical paper records that constituted an official case record. With the new MRCIS the electronic application becomes the official case record of the consumer.

MRC is moving forward, despite the economy; always thinking outside the box and doing everything possible to ensure that our consumers get good jobs with good wages.

For more information about the services the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission provides, please visit their website at [Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission](#)



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### Design your Documents with ACCESSIBILITY in Mind, part II

By: **Maria D. Gonzalez**, Office of Access & Opportunity

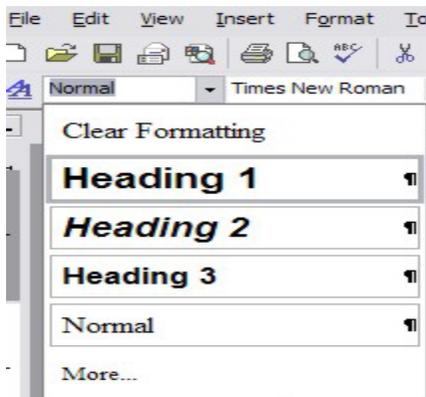
In our last issue of Dialogue, I covered the common accessibility issues with Microsoft word, styles and headings, visual versus programmatic formatting and the use of size of fonts.

In this issue we will continue to focus on formatting, but with respect to headings, tables and images. I will review Microsoft Office Versions 2003 – 2010 and how the formats differ depending on the version of Microsoft Word you are using.

#### Word 2003

The drop-down styles list allows you to create true headings, as well as apply any previously-created custom style.

There are a couple of advantages of having true structure in Word documents. First, when the file is exported to HTML, it will retain the structure, making it accessible to screen readers. Second, the structure will also be retained when exported to PDF. In both cases, the added structure increases the readability of the document for people using screen readers.



**Figure 1:** Screenshot of the styles drop down list for Word 2003



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### Word 2007 and 2010

Word 2007 and later does a good job of encouraging the use of proper styles. About half of the default toolbar is devoted to styles. To change a block of text, select the text and click on the appropriate style.

**Figure 2:** Screenshot of styles toolbar for Word 2007 and 2010.



### Use short titles in headings

When you use headings in a document, be sure to keep them short (fewer than 20 words). In general, headings should be, at most, one line long. This makes it easier for readers to quickly navigate the document, either by scanning it, or by using the Navigation pane.

### General Presentational Issues

The use of **background images** in either electronic or print documents should always be avoided. Equally you should take care to ensure that your documents provide **sufficient contrast** between the text and the background.

The use of **color text** can often be problematic for persons with color blindness and should be avoided. These colorful features have become somewhat popular in some e-mail applications (often referred to as "stationery"). It's generally a good idea to refrain from using these features altogether.

From a usability perspective, it is a good idea to view your document in monochrome by printing it out on a black and white printer. If you have used colored features in your document (e.g., colored charts and graphs) these may be distorted and illegible when printed in black and white.

### Convert text boxes to regular paragraphs

Text-boxes provide a means to add text to a document, and locate it anywhere on the page. However, text boxes work more like images than text and because of it they will only show up in **the print layout view**. Screen Reading software is unable to access the information in a text box.

Instead of text boxes, style formatting can be used to locate the text in the desired place on the page. Style (paragraph-level) formatting may take a few more steps to achieve than using text-boxes but style formatting is much more accessible for Screen Readers.



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### Images:

When a document contains an image the screen reader alerts the reader. However, the screen reader cannot communicate anything else about the image unless the author has added an "alternative description." This description, sometimes referred to as the "ALT description" based upon the HTML attribute ALT, provides the screen reader - and therefore the user - with more information about the image (e.g., seal of the Commonwealth of MA).

There are three main types of graphics and the amount and type of description used as alternate text depends on the type and the purpose of the graphic. Alt Text should convey the following: meaning, function or purpose of the image.

- Information-Type Graphics: relay important information not contained in the adjacent text (example a logo, a seal, a flag) this type of graphics definitely needs Alt-Text
- Redundant-Type Graphics: contains information that is repeated or duplicated in adjacent text. It may require some short Alt-Text.
- Decorative-Type Graphics: contains no information necessary for the understanding of the document. This graphics do not need Alt-text.

While images in documents are typically decorative in nature – the "pretty pictures" - occasionally there are images inserted in documents that include graphic text or information that is essential to the understanding of the document. In such cases the Alternative description must be a detailed explanation of the image.

### Tabled Information

The use of tables in documents is a common practice and for the display of data and certain information, tables are a vital component. The chief concern about tabled information is order in which the content will be read by the screen reader. Care must be taken to ensure that when the content is read by a screen reader, it is communicated in a way that makes sense.

Screen readers read the information on the screen in the standard left-to-right and top-to-bottom fashion and thus will read the content cell by cell until it reaches the end of the table. The default setting for most tables is that the top row of information provides a descriptive "heading" for the information contained in the column below. By default, tables created in MS Word will automatically convert content in the top row to be the heading.



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While tabled information will always present challenges to persons using screen readers, they can be particularly problematic if the data within is presented in an order that is illogical or confusing. Once again, care must be taken to review the tabled data to determine it makes sense to a person using a screen reader.

**Tables in word processor documents should only be used to present data and not used for layout purposes.**

If your document requires special layout (e.g., information with sidebars and text boxes) you should use a different application (i.e., desktop publishing software like Adobe InDesign or MS Publisher) to prepare these documents.

### **In Recap:**

There are seven parts to making documents accessible;

- Well structured
- Providing text alternatives for ALL images and graphics
- Ensuring that all text has strong contrast with the background color
- Avoiding color text
- Correctly formatting tables
- Providing text to links that explains the link's purpose
- Conversion of documents to an accessible file format

### **References:**

[Maine Cite](#)

[Microsoft Creating Accessible Word Documents](#)

[Webaim Create Accessible Documents](#)

[Making Your Word Documents Accessible](#)

Hopefully, the tips we have shared in these last two articles will assist you greatly as you endeavor to create documents and files that are accessible, more predictable and consistent to everyone viewing those documents through the use of assistive technology.

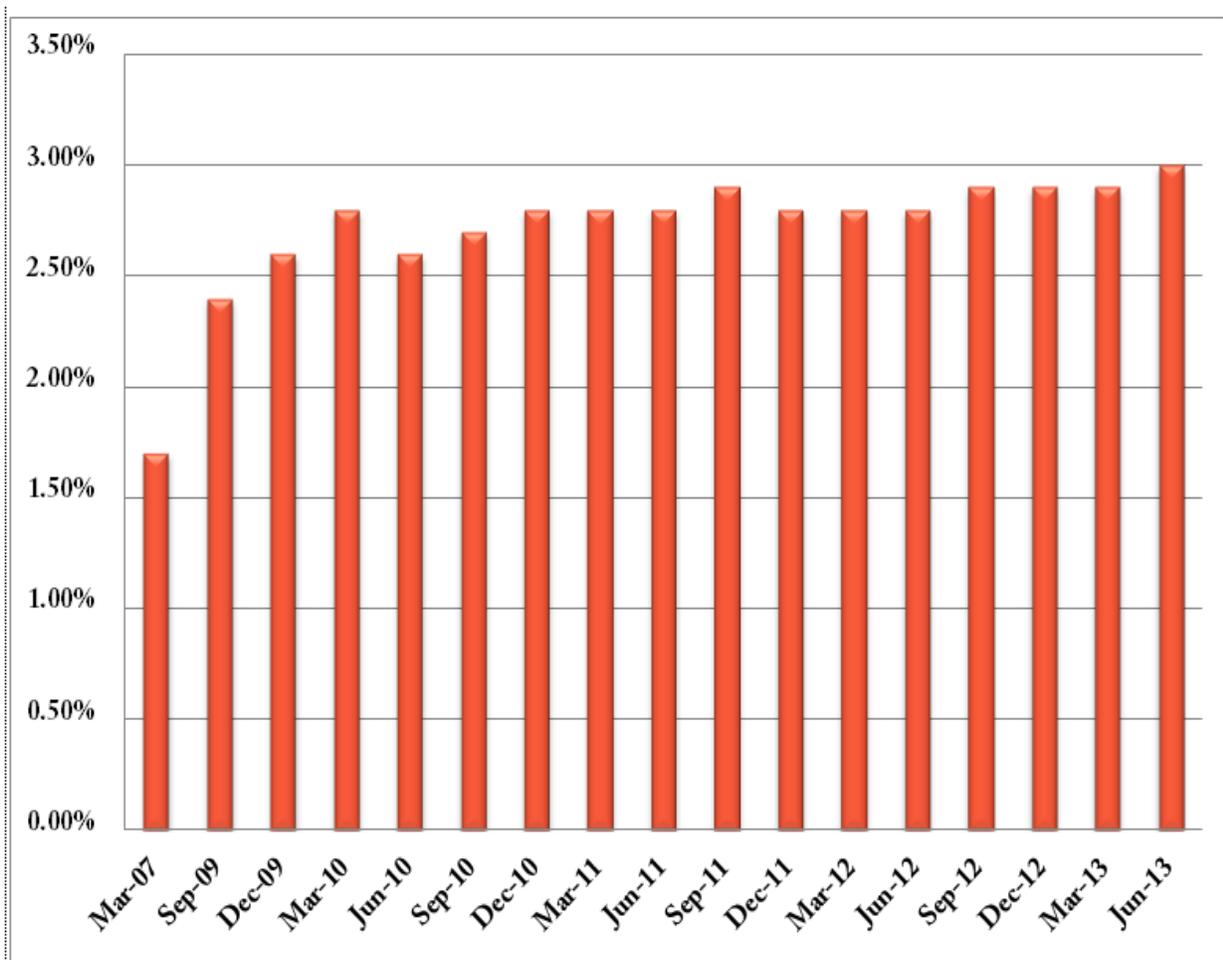


**The Commonwealth: Working to be a Model Employer**

**ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?**

**Chart 1. The Percentage of Self-Identified Executive Branch Employees from March 2007 to June 2013**

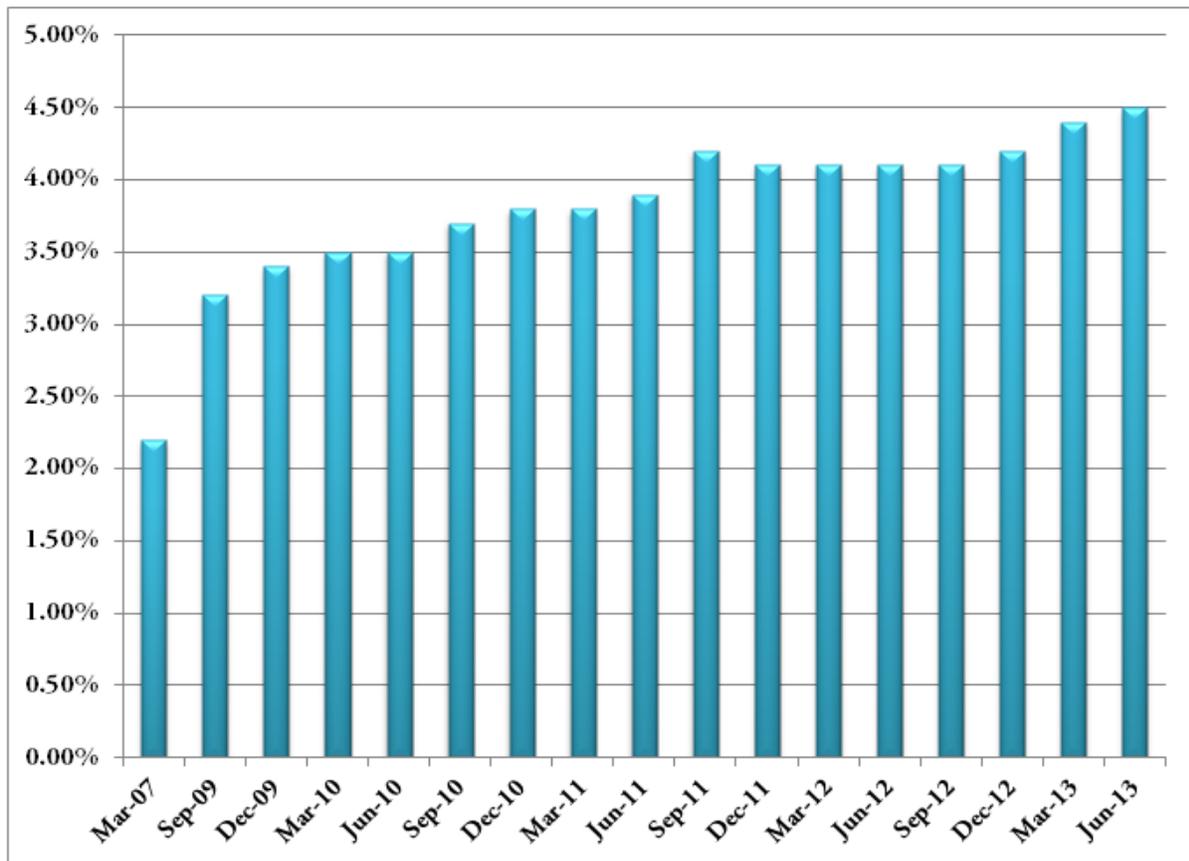
The percentage of self-identified Executive Branch employees hit 3% in June 2013, for the first time since we started tracking this in March 2007. This reflects an increase from 2.9% in September 2012, December 2012, and March 2013, and from 2.8% in June 2012.



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**Chart 2.** The Percentage of Self-Identified Executive Branch Management Employees from March 2007 to June 2013.

The percentage of self-identified Executive Branch Management employees hit a mark of 4.5% in June 2013, in comparison to the 2.2% reported in March 2007. The percentages have increased steadily; 3.4% in December 2009, 3.5% in June 2010, 4.2% in September 2011 and 4.2% in December 2012.



**Pie Chart 1.** The Percentage of Self-identified Executive Branch Managers and Employees by EEO-4 Job Category as of close of Quarter 4, FY13.

The categories and percentages are as follow: Professional 61%, Management 13%, Office/Clerical 13%, Service Maintenance 3%, Technician 3% and other 7% (**note:** other positions include Protected Service Positions (sworn and non-sworn) and Skilled Craft Position)

