



Examining the value of Mobile Resource Center services

*An online survey of Mobile Resource
Center partner organizations*

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Introduction

Homeless and low-income individuals need an array of supportive services on their journey to self-sufficiency, particularly employment readiness and computer literacy services. While many see computers and technology as pervasive in our modern society, those who are experiencing homelessness or who have a low income often do not have access to, or have little experience with, these necessary components of employment readiness and job searching.

The Mobile Resource Center (MRC), a program of the Wilder Foundation, helps homeless and low-income individuals prepare for, find, and retain gainful employment in two key ways: 1) Steps-to-Success, an employment readiness program that removes traditional barriers to employment, such as cost, transportation, and prerequisite training or referrals, and 2) a volunteer-driven mobile computer lab where participants can familiarize themselves with technology and access online resources.

Although there is a continuing need for these services to be made available for homeless and low-income individuals, difficult economic times have caused the MRC to explore the idea of charging a fee to sites that use their services. To gauge reactions to this idea, the MRC asked Wilder Research to conduct a web survey of its partners, which include Wilder Foundation staff. The survey was available to partners from January 7 – 23, 2013. Wilder Research sent a survey link to 19 partners; 16 participated, for a response rate of 84 percent. Three participants did not complete the entire survey; therefore, the n-size for some tables is less than 16.

Summary

Having the on-site classes for our families really makes the difference in attendance and outcomes. Our families have obstacles to maintaining child care and having consistent reliable transportation to access off-site resources. Also, many of the families we serve have significant disabilities and the smaller classroom and ability to individualize allows everyone to achieve success.

The goal of this research was not only to measure partner organizations' willingness to pay for Mobile Resource Center classes, but also to uncover the value that partners place on those classes, and their experiences working with the MRC program and its staff.

The survey found that partners:

- View MRC classes as imparting valuable skills to their clients
- See the MRC as providing high-quality services that are unique to the East Metro area
- Think very highly of the MRC staff, which they say does a good job of teaching valuable skills to their clients

Despite the fact that partners value MRC classes, however, they are reluctant to say they would pay a fee for services. In general, partners surveyed said they do not have enough funding or money in their budgets to pay for extra fees. Several participants also said that they do not have the authority at their organization to make decisions related to money.

More detailed findings from the survey are discussed in the next section.

Detailed Findings

Partnership experience

Overall, those who participated in the survey were pleased with their Mobile Resource Center partnership. All respondents (N=16) said they have had positive experiences interacting and working with the MRC’s staff, with 94 percent saying their experiences have been “very” positive (Figure 1).

[I am] very pleased with the MRC services and staff! They are excellent, highly qualified people.

We sincerely appreciated being able to offer the MRC to families at our site, and [the] staff were terrific!

In addition, all respondents said that their agency’s partnership with the MRC was effective (100%) and that they would recommend it to other nonprofit agencies (100%) (Figure 2). A majority (94%) also stated that the MRC has met or exceeded their expectations.

When asked how the MRC could better collaborate with its partner agencies, a couple of respondents stated that the MRC should offer more classes, including one person who recommended evening classes for clients who have to be at work during the day.

1. Experience with MRC staff

Overall, would you say that your experiences interacting and working with the Mobile Resource Center’s staff have been...	(N=16)	%
Very positive	15	94%
Somewhat positive	1	6%
Somewhat negative	0	0%
Somewhat negative	0	0%

2. Overall partnership experience

Please say whether the following statements are true or false.	True		False	
	N	%	N	%
Overall, our agency's partnership with MRC was effective. (N=16)	16	100%	0	0%
I would recommend the MRC to other nonprofit agencies. (N=16)	16	100%	0	0%
Overall, our agency's partnership with MRC met or exceeded my initial expectations. (N=16)	15	94%	1	6%

Mobile Resource Center services

Number of classes

Half of those who participated in the survey have hosted MRC classes at least seven times, and three-quarters have hosted classes at least four times (Figure 3). Under two in ten (19%) have hosted classes 1 to 3 times, and only 1 respondent had never hosted an MRC class at her/his site.

The majority of respondents said that the MRC offers enough classes to their clients; although, again, a couple of partners would like to see more classes offered. No one reported that the MRC offers too many classes (Figure 4).

3. Number of MRC classes hosted

During the past year, approximately how many Mobile Resource Center classes has your agency hosted?	(N=16)	%
None	1	6%
1 to 3	3	19%
4 to 6	4	25%
7 to 9	3	19%
10 or more	5	31%

4. Amount of MRC classes offered

How do you feel about the number of classes that the Mobile Resource Center offers to your clients? Does the Mobile Resource Center offer...

	(N=14)	%
Too many classes	0	0%
Enough classes	10	71%
Not enough classes	2	14%
Don't know	2	14%

Skills taught in Mobile Resource Center classes

The partners surveyed said that the MRC does a good job of teaching clients a variety of skills through coursework, particularly building the confidence of course participants – 67 percent said the MRC does an excellent job of teaching this skill, 13 percent said they do a very good job, and 7 percent said they do a good job (Figure 5). Partners also said that the MRC does well at teaching basic computer skills (60% excellent, 20% very good, 7% good) and teaching participants how to write and send an email (53% excellent, 27% very good, 7% good). No one said that the MRC does a poor or terrible job of teaching any of the skills listed in the survey.

When asked which Mobile Resource Center skill is the **most valuable** to their clients, most participants said “teaching basic computer skills” (60%) (Figure 6). Two in ten (20%) said that “teaching new skills to assist participants in obtaining employment” was the most valuable skill for their clients, and 7% (or 1 person) each said that “building the confidence of participants,” “teaching Internet safety,” and “teaching clients how to find and use job search websites” were the most valuable skills for their clients.

5. Skills taught in MRC classes

Based on your experience, how would you rate the job that the Mobile Resource Center does at teaching the following skills? Would you say they do an excellent job at teaching this skill, a very good job, a good job, average, a poor job, a terrible job at teaching this skill, or not applicable?

	Excellent		Very good		Good		Average		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Building the confidence of participants (N=15)	10	67%	2	13%	1	7%	1	7%	1	7%
Teaching basic computer skills (N=15)	9	60%	3	20%	1	7%	1	7%	1	7%
Teaching participants how to write and send an email (N=15)	8	53%	4	27%	1	7%	0	0%	2	13%
Teaching participants how to create an email account (N=15)	7	47%	5	33%	0	0%	0	0%	3	20%
Teaching clients how to find and use job search websites (N=15)	6	40%	2	13%	3	20%	0	0%	4	27%
Teaching Microsoft Office (N=15)	6	40%	2	13%	1	7%	0	0%	6	40%
Teaching clients how to write competitive resumes (N=15)	6	40%	1	7%	0	0%	1	7%	7	47%
Teaching Internet safety (N=15)	5	33%	4	27%	1	7%	0	0%	5	33%
Teaching participants how to draft a professional document on Microsoft Word (N=15)	5	33%	3	20%	1	7%	0	0%	6	40%
Improving typing speed (N=15)	4	27%	3	20%	1	7%	1	7%	6	40%
Teaching better time management (N=15)	4	27%	2	13%	2	13%	0	0%	7	47%
Teaching new skills to assist participants in obtaining employment (N=15)	4	27%	2	13%	1	7%	1	7%	7	47%

Note: The categories "a poor job" and "a terrible job" were omitted from this table because all responses totaled zero.

6. Most valuable skills taught in MRC classes

In your view, which Mobile Resource Center skill is the MOST valuable to the clients you serve?	(N=15)	%
Teaching basic computer skills	9	60%
Teaching new skills to assist participants in obtaining employment	3	20%
Building the confidence of participants	1	7%
Teaching Internet safety	1	7%
Teaching clients how to find and use job search websites	1	7%
Teaching clients how to write competitive resumes	0	0%
Teaching Microsoft Office	0	0%
Teaching participants how to create an email account	0	0%
Teaching participants how to write and send an email	0	0%
Teaching participants how to draft a professional document on Microsoft Word	0	0%
Improving typing speed	0	0%
Teaching better time management	0	0%

Uniqueness of MRC classes

Partners of the Mobile Resource Center rate its services very highly, with a majority (80%) saying overall services are excellent, 7 percent saying they are very good, and 13 percent saying they are good (Figure 7).

Most partners do not have any suggestions for improving MRC services. Only five participants responded to an open-ended question seeking input on improving services, and of those five, four respondents said they would not make any changes (Figure 8). One suggestion was that the MRC should “provide another employment training class to residents [on-site]” that would give them information about job leads and job fairs.

7. Quality of MRC services

Overall, how would you rate the services provided by the Mobile Resource Center?	(N=15)	%
Excellent	12	80%
Very good	1	7%
Good	2	13%
Average	0	0%
Poor	0	0%
Terrible	0	0%

8. Improving MRC services

In what ways can the Mobile Resource Center improve its services? [OPEN END]	(N=5)	%
No changes/Like MRC services the way they are	4	80%
Provide another employment training class	1	20%

Not only do partners rate MRC services highly, but they see them as unique to the East Metro area. For those surveyed, the most unique services are basic computer and Internet classes offered on-site (73% unique), computer classes for non-native English speakers offered on-site (67% unique), and open lab, provided on-site (47% unique) (Figure 9).

When asked if there are other computer classes available to clients, in a location that is convenient for them, most partners said “no” (85%) (Figure 10). The two participants who responded “yes,” said that their clients go to Century College, local libraries, or the Lao Family Community of Minnesota to participate in computer classes. They also said that their clients can travel up to 15 minutes to get to these locations.

9. Uniqueness of MRC services

Please say whether you have found the following Mobile Resource Center services to be unique or if you can find these services at other organizations in the East Metro?

	Unique		Not unique		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Basic computer and Internet classes offered at your agency's site (N=15)	11	73%	1	7%	3	20%
Computer classes for non-native English speakers offered at your agency's site (N=15)	10	67%	0	0%	5	33%
Open lab, provided at your agency's site (N=15)	7	47%	3	20%	5	33%
Youth programming, e.g., Technology Club (N=15)	5	33%	2	13%	8	53%
Help in finding appropriate job search websites (N=15)	5	33%	2	13%	8	53%
Support completing job applications and cover letters (N=15)	4	27%	3	20%	8	53%
Help writing and building competitive resumes (N=15)	4	27%	4	27%	7	47%

10. Other classes available

Besides MRC classes, are there other computer classes available to your clients in a location that is convenient for them?

	(N=13)	%
No	11	85%
Yes	2	15%

Willingness to pay for services

MRC classes

While partners highly value the computer and career-readiness classes offered by the Mobile Resource Center, only three in ten (29%) said they would pay a fee to host these classes, whereas seven in ten (71%) said they would not (Figure 11). Those who are willing to pay a fee stated that it was because MRC services are beneficial to their clients and provide them with needed skills. For those who are unwilling to pay, the most commonly cited reason was that they do not have enough money in their budget (78%). Another reason respondents said they are reluctant to pay for MRC classes (or offer an

amount they would be willing to pay) is that they do not feel they have the authority to make such a decision themselves; several said they would have to leave that decision to their supervisor or project manager (Figure 13).

A smaller proportion of Wilder Foundation employees (25%) than non-Wilder employees (33%) said that they would be willing to pay a fee for MRC services; however, it is important to note that the n-sizes are small for both groups (Figure 12).

11. Willingness to pay for MRC classes

Would your agency be willing to pay a fee for the classes that the Mobile Resource Center provides? (This would be a fee per class. Participants would not be charged and the fee would remain the same regardless of the number of participants.)

	(N=14)	%
No	10	71%
Yes	4	29%
Why not? [OPEN END]	(N=9)	
Not in the budget/Not enough funding	7	78%
Do not have the authority to say/need to ask management	2	22%
Why would your agency be willing to pay a fee for MRC classes? [OPEN END]	(N=3)	
The services are beneficial/provide needed skills for residents	2	67%
Not sure	1	33%

12. Willingness to pay by agency

Would your agency be willing to pay a fee for the classes that the Mobile Resource Center provides? (This would be a fee per class. Participants would not be charged and the fee would remain the same regardless of the number of participants.)

	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Wilder respondents (N=8)	2	25%	6	75%
Non-Wilder respondents (N=6)	2	33%	4	67%

13. Amount willing to pay for MRC classes

What is the maximum fee that your agency would be willing to pay per Mobile Resource Center class? [OPEN END]

	(N=3)	%
Not sure without consulting management/other staff	3	100%

A la carte services

Survey participants express some amount of interest in pay-as-you-go, or *a la carte*, services; a majority said they are interested in one-on-one mentoring (75% interested, 17% very) and staff training (67% interested, 17% very). Fewer, although still half, are interested in the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment modules (50% interested, 8% very).

While they are interested in these services, almost no one can say how much they would be willing to pay. Again, this has to do with partners stating they do not have the authority to make that decision. (One respondent said the maximum amount she or he would pay for one-on-one mentoring is twenty dollars; another client would pay up to fifty dollars for staff training.)

14. Interest in a la carte services

How interested would your agency be in hiring the Mobile Resource Center for the following pay-as-you-go services for you and your staff?

	Very interested		Somewhat interested		Not very interested		Not at all interested	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
One-on-one mentoring (in 1-hour increments): This MRC program provides one-on-one mentoring for staff members on topics tailored to staff needs. (N=12)	2	17%	7	58%	1	8%	2	17%
Staff training: This MRC program provides basic computer training to staff who are seeking new skills to improve effectiveness. (N=12)	2	17%	6	50%	2	17%	2	17%
Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment modules: This MRC program proctors a Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment at your site to allow your participants to obtain a certificate showcasing their new skills to employers. Learn more: http://www.digital literacyassessment.org . (N=12)	1	8%	5	42%	4	33%	2	17%

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the online partner survey, Wilder Research has the following recommendations for the Mobile Resource Center in communicating with its partners, particularly about implementing new fees.

- Speak one-on-one with program partners to gauge individual, site-specific feedback, and to explain the need for charging fees. Specifically, speak with supervisors or program managers, as those responding to the survey felt ill-qualified to make payment decisions.
- Emphasize what partners already know, which is that the MRC provides much-needed computer and career-readiness classes for their clients. Partners are happy with the number and quality of classes they are currently receiving, and some are interested in having more classes.
- Emphasize the uniqueness of MRC classes, particularly that they are located on-site. Partners know that there are not a lot of other comparable, conveniently located classes available for their clients.
- Focus especially on emphasizing that the MRC teaches basic computer skills and new skills to obtain employment, as well as building the confidence of class participants, teaching Internet safety, and teaching clients how to find and use job search websites.

While partner organizations may be resistant to new fees, they also understand the importance of the Mobile Resource Center and the value of its services.