



# Peer Program Checklist

Task	Description	Personal notes, follow up, etc.
Identify possible gaps in services that peers can fill.	Consult as many staff members, case workers, managers, and especially the clients themselves. Getting buy-in from your team and the individuals you serve will help when it's time to incorporate the program into your organization. Change can be difficult!	
Identify funding source and secure money	Are you applying for a grant to fund your peer project or using funds allocated by your organization? If you're using grant money to start a program, keep in mind the challenges that come with short term grants (1 year or less). These challenges include: lack of job security for peers, very little time to establish your project, often not enough time to reach some of the harder-to-serve clients.  Determining the position's rate of pay also falls under this step	
Connect with local organizations that already have peer programs.	Meeting with other organizations who already have a peer program up and running can be very informative. Rather than re-inventing the wheel, learn from their successes and the lessons they've learned along the way. Meeting with the peers themselves can provide different points of view; bonus points if you compensate the peers for sharing their experience and job knowledge.	

<p>Create an official job description before the hiring process begins.</p>	<p>Because each organization utilizes peers in different ways, a clear and concise job description will help clarify expectations/job duties – it may also be helpful to the staff during the transition. **If you work in a unionized environment, take that into consideration as well.</p>	
<p>Consult with HR when creating the contract for the positions.</p>	<p>Include HR's wealth of knowledge and consider what the contract should consist of, and if the peers should follow standard hiring procedure (examples: police records check, signing off on code of conduct &amp; confidentiality. Some organizations have adjusted their policies for the peer workers to help accommodate some of the challenges that come up. Also consider your method of payment. Some peers may not have bank accounts or ID and so direct deposit can pose difficulties, etc. Many peers are on OW/ODSP and choose not to report income to avoid deductions. Ultimately these responsibilities fall on the peer, but take care in explaining the process so that it's well understood.</p>	
<p>Peer Manual &amp; Training</p>	<p>Create a peer manual and training checklist specific to your organization. Have a couple handy in the peer office so that it can be reviewed on a regular basis or if questions arise. Manuals such as these can be updated regularly as you make changes. We also offered the peers all of the mandatory trainings that new hires are expected to complete within their probationary period. Courses like ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), NVCI (non-violent crisis intervention), First Aid, Narcan training, etc. Upon offering these trainings, it's important to recognize that full days of training may be difficult for some peers. Trying to cater to the needs of the peers (more frequent breaks, shorter days, etc) may make the trainings more successful</p>	
<p>Create Job posting and CIRCULATE</p>	<p>Now that you have a job description ready, it's fairly simple to turn it into a posting. Consider making accommodations for those who are not computer savvy or literate, or who do not have English as their first language. Be sure to include the rate of pay on the posting and any other details that might attract/deter candidates from the position. You want serious applicants only, as you're likely to get many applications and interviews are very time-consuming.</p>	

	It is suggested that you circulate the posting to multiple organizations. Having a variety of peers with different strengths really contributes to a rounded team and makes for great discussion.	
Resume or Application?	From what I've learned from my program and many other peer programs in the Ottawa area, an application is a more effective way to get the information you'd like because you can ask specific questions to screen in the most promising candidates. As mentioned before, computer skills and literacy are common challenges, so I invited people to drop off their application at the shelter. I also provided an email and a fax number for those who were more proficient.	
Interview Process	Interviews for a peer position might be a time of high stress. Using your experiences with drug use/sex work/mental health, etc to qualify for a job may be very difficult to talk about. Always keep in mind that self-disclosure depends on the individual's comfort level – don't expect a life story in great detail. Do not put anyone on the spot with intrusive questions. On that note, the idea of group interviews may relieve stress for some, but increase it for others. Its main benefit of course is using considerably less time. If you do decide on group interviews, keep in mind that the interview candidates might know each other outside of work and may put them in precarious positions	
Update existing staff on progress (and continue to do so regularly)	No doubt the staff are very excited and nervous about the upcoming changes. Trying to share info in as many directions as possible will help the process be less stressful for everyone. Remind everyone of why they bought into the peer program in the beginning and let them know (hopefully with some time to spare) before the program starts running.	
Choose the candidates that best suit the needs you're trying to address.	Although often despised, calling the applicants who were not successful and offering feedback is often a much appreciated gesture. In choosing the candidates, keep in mind your expectation of their substance use. Do you expect 100% sobriety? Are you A-OK with what the peer does on their own time as long as it does not affect their job performance?	

Space	Do your absolute best at having the peer space/office/etc. ready for action BEFORE the peers start working. Providing privacy for the peers to engage clients will make the process much smoother. An office phone & computer are also recommended. Clients will need to make calls, and the computer is an excellent tool for looking up apartments on Kijiji or just simply printing out colouring pages for some relaxation.	
Create Schedule and Circulate it throughout Organization	Things to take into consideration are the peer's pre-existing schedule, and the times of day that would work best for them. For example, peers may need to pick up methadone in the morning, so if you can get this information, you can put together a schedule that's practical. You likely have a budgeted number of hours you can pay out each week – another thing to keep into consideration. Finally, some peers excel in different areas; I have one who gets a huge group of residents involved in arts & crafts, another who really enjoys accompanying clients to their appointments, and a third who likes to make the rounds and do some outreach in the community. Take the peer's strengths, what motivates them, and consider these things when creating a schedule. Once the schedule is complete, send it out to the entire program staff so that everyone is aware of when the peers are or are not available.	
Team Meetings	Holding monthly team meetings has been an effective way to encourage communication between the peers and to work on team-building. At SGH, very few of the peers have overlapping shifts, so they may not see each other too often. Having a paid meeting to catch up and to build on ideas or talk about frustrations is helpful for me as the manager, and for them as the hard-working team!	
Create a peer specific performance evaluation tool.	Good communication is one of the major factors in running a smooth peer program. Thirty-minute monthly supervision meetings (to celebrate victories and to provide space for the peer to say anything they have on their mind is a great way to keep the lines of communication open. Furthermore, doing a performance evaluation every 3 or 6 months is a great tool for setting and following up with individualized goals and help maintain motivation.	

Continuous check-ins with staff who are interacting with peers	Regular check-ins with staff will help you stay ahead of potential conflict. Peers and existing staff will butt heads with each other, but with regular check-ins, you can (hopefully) prevent blow ups or toxic work environments.	
MAKE IT SO!	There will never be enough money, enough buy-in from the staff or the perfect candidates. Don't let this deter you. Throughout the first two years of this project, many things boiled down to trial and error (which I prefer to call <i>lessons learned</i> )	

### Recommended Online Readings for additional info:

- <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/document/445/making-case-peer-support>
- <http://eenet.ca/sites/default/files/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Best-Practices-PeerSupport-Final-Report-2014.pdf>
- [www.peersupportcanada.ca](http://www.peersupportcanada.ca)

...and so much more!

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