

Step 3 - Program Implementation

Solid program implementation is built on a strong infrastructure of planning, policies, and buy-in from leadership and participants. It is important to have clear and consistent messaging from the onset of program development that addresses the stigma surrounding help-seeking after a crisis or traumatic situation. Program success is contingent on employees believing that participation in the peer support program won't be noted in their personnel file or on any employee evaluation. Clearly defined protocols for requesting assistance are a key component of a strong program marketing plan. Organizations should host informational sessions for employees explaining the program and emphasizing the confidential nature of all services and include information in human resources materials and new employee onboarding information.

Another vital aspect for program success is a plan and supports for those serving as peer support specialists. Ensuring they are aware of resources available to them if they need support, such as agency wellness staff who have been trained to provide trauma informed and culturally responsive supports for public safety employees.

Step 4 - Maintenance

Establishing a plan for sustainability that ensures policies and procedures are ingrained in the organization, quality measured, and outcomes monitored, will help the peer support program achieve the mission and have longevity. Develop an advisory board to monitor goals and outcomes and create and maintain a sustainability plan.

A sustainability plan should have annual audits of finances and policies and include anonymous feedback from participants and peer support specialists. Continuity planning helps sustain the peer support program through leadership and personnel changes. Re-evaluate the program quarterly and modify as necessary. If the program is not having the desired impact, take that opportunity to expand the scope of services or shift course.

Step 5 - Evaluation

Monitor policies on activation and deactivation of peer teams, overtime incurred, referral processes, and communication plans to see if these policies are benefiting the program or need to be altered. Conduct reoccurring meetings with peer team members to confirm policies are working and determine if adjustments need to be made as the program evolves.

While developing the peer support program, put measures in place to support and periodically assess the psychological well-being of peer support specialists. As stress and trauma are cumulative, serving as a peer support specialist in a first responder agency can quickly compound the impacts of traumatic events and daily stress. Identifying and providing access to resources is vital to ensure the readiness to respond among these first responders, as well as to support their continued support of their colleagues. In addition to providing access to available resources, it's important to include information regarding these resources in the program orientation and application process and build questions into program evaluations to gauge if peer support specialists understand where they can seek for resources and help. Tapping into similar programs in partner agencies can also ensure that your peer support

specialists have a safe place to turn should they need someone outside their agencies with whom to talk.

Data to illustrate success is necessary to demonstrate the value of the program. Create a data collection system that ensures the confidential nature of the work. Data collection policies should be established and stress that only de-identified, process measures be collected. Neither the peer support specialist nor the employee receiving services should be identified in collected data. Collect data that identifies usage of the team and outcomes to guide decision making, adjust training content, ensure availability of the program, and identify if additional resources are needed. It is critical in the tracking and data collection that no information discussed during the peer support intervention is recorded.

Develop an evaluation system for peer support team members. Create an after-action report template for peer support team members to analyze how well the intervention went and ways to improve in the future. Evaluation surveys should be confidential and assess the effectiveness of the intervention, preparation of team members, adequacy of staffing and other resources, and opportunities for improvement. Also, develop an employee evaluation for the peer support team members and establish a timeline for when, how, and who will evaluate the members.