

## Best Practices for Integrating Peers into Multi-disciplinary Teams

Integration is the continuous practice of ensuring that the peer functions as, and is perceived as, an essential part of the multi-disciplinary team. The process of integrating peers/consumer workers into an agency is an intricate one; the research has shown that there are some practices that support the successful incorporation of peers. For example:

**Adopt an Inclusive Approach to Program Conceptualization, Creation, and Implementation.** Whenever possible, include consumers (for example, through your CAB) in the design of your peer program, including considering what kinds of roles peers can play.

**Ensure buy-in throughout the agency.** Integrating peers requires buy-in from the entire organization from the top down, including, but not limited to, human resources, IT, senior administration as well as other departmental leadership and staff.

**Create thorough formal job descriptions.** Peers must have a defined job description, with roles and responsibilities that befitting the goal of obtaining their specific AIDS Institute Peer Certification track(s). Peers should offer services that are part of an array of other services, and they should work closely with staff in other roles as part of their work. Clear job descriptions also convey expected duties such as regular supervisory meetings between peer and supervisor.

**Prioritize fair compensation for the peer/consumer worker**, and with it, support from key human resources personnel, keeping in mind that financial compensation may impact a peer's human resource benefits, such as social security, SNAP, and HASA. Utilize the [Benefits Consulting Pilot Project](#).

**Implement a communications plan around peers at your agency.** The role of the peer and how they support the goal and mission of the program or agency should be conveyed to all clients and staff. Clients should be made aware that a peer/s are available at designated sites, including the Consumer Worker's office hours and roles.

**Assign a space for your peer to work.** A designated workstation can be beneficial to the process of peer integration. It provides inclusion and ownership of the department/project, organization, and its mission.

**Create an inclusive on-boarding/probationary process.** During this 90-day to 6-month period, peers can acclimated to agency/program policies and procedures, their job roles, and those of other staff.

**Create an organizational culture/structure that treats peers as equals.** Describe them as part of your team; ensure they are subject to the same policies as other employees, and require them to take the same trainings as your agency's other staff members. For example,

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they may be required to complete an annual internal confidentiality training or a sexual harassment training.

**Develop a robust, ongoing supervision structure.** Supervisors should meet with Peer employees regularly to review job performance, certification progress, professional development goals, and to ensure the peers physical and mental health are not being negatively affected by their work. Supervisors can use the AIDS Institute's Supervisory Evaluation tool during this time to define goals and ensure the peer is making progress.

**Include peers in all program meetings.** As peers play an integral role between client and provider in maintaining a positive relationship and improving overall health outcomes, inclusion and attendance at all program meetings are important. These include but are not limited to, case conferences and team meetings. Specify peer worker's contribution to case conferences in advance and assign them relevant tasks related to the case conference afterwards.

**Create pathways for growth.** Finally, identifying and hiring peers into non-entry-level roles after certification is important in providing a bridge allowing peers to gain skills and grow into full-time professional roles.

### Tips:

- ❖ Attend the two-day AIDS Institute Supervising Consumer Workers Training, which is intended to help supervisors understand the certification process and how to best support peer employees in a way that benefits the peer, the program, the clients, and the agency.
- ❖ Take a multidisciplinary approach ensuring that all the members of the team are included in organizational staff meetings. It allows the peer to hear what else is happening at your organization and what opportunities may arise for them to grow.
- ❖ Allowing peers to apply for conference scholarships can provide additional professional development resources while allowing your to remain within your organizational funding constraints.

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