



Peer Support Team Startup Toolkit

A Practical Guide
for Law Enforcement Agencies
to Develop, Implement, and
Sustain a Peer Support
Program

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Resources Used to Develop This Toolkit

This toolkit was developed drawing on a combination of national guidance, peer support resources, law enforcement wellness materials, existing peer support program guidance, and other available resources relevant to law enforcement peer support. These resources informed the recommendations, program considerations, implementation strategies, and evaluation approaches presented throughout the toolkit. We are grateful to the organizations, authors, and practitioners whose expertise, resources, and contributions informed the development of this toolkit.

This toolkit represents a synthesis of information from these and other available resources and is not intended to replace the original source materials. Agencies may review the original source materials and applicable state and local requirements when developing or modifying their own peer support policies and procedures. The inclusion of a resource does not constitute an endorsement of every recommendation or approach contained within that resource.

Purpose and Use of This Toolkit

Developing a successful peer support program requires thoughtful planning, collaboration, organizational commitment, and ongoing support. This toolkit provides practical guidance to help law enforcement agencies develop, implement, and sustain an effective peer support program that reflects their unique needs, culture, and resources.ⁱ

Every agency is different. The toolkit is intended to be flexible and adaptable, providing suggested considerations and checklists that agencies can tailor to their circumstances while maintaining the core principles of effective peer support. Agencies can determine which approaches are most appropriate for their organization.

Agencies may use this toolkit to:

- Develop a new peer support program
- Strengthen an existing program
- Evaluate current practices
- Identify opportunities for improvement

Peer Support: What It Is and Why It Matters

Peer support is a confidential,ⁱⁱ voluntary, and relationship-based approach that provides emotional and practical support to law enforcement personnel through shared experience. It promotes connection and resilience, encourages early support, and helps connect agency personnel with appropriate resources when additional assistance is needed. Access to trusted peers who understand the demands of the profession provide an additional pathway for personnel to seek support, build connection, and access appropriate resources.

Peer support is one component of a comprehensive employee wellness strategy. It complements existing agency resources, such as supervisor support, mentoring, chaplain services, employee assistance programs, and access to mental health professionals. Peer Support Specialists provide emotional support, encouragement, and resource navigation while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and recognizing when additional resources may be needed.^{iii iv}

As defined by KRS 65.1591, a Peer Support Specialist (PSS) "means a public safety employee designated by the public agency to provide peer support counseling who has received training in both peer support counseling and in providing emotional and moral support to public safety employees who have been in or exposed to an emotionally traumatic experience in the course of employment."	A Peer Support Team is a group of trained Peer Support Specialists who understand the stress of the job and have volunteered to provide emotional and practical support to fellow employees experiencing professional or personal challenges, critical incidents, or other stressful life events. ^v
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Benefits of Peer Support

Effective peer support programs can provide benefits at multiple levels^{vi}

Personnel	Agency
Increased connection and support	Improved awareness of personnel needs
Improved access to resources	Stronger recruitment and retention efforts
Increased resilience	Demonstrated commitment to personnel support
Reduced stigma around seeking support	Healthier organizational culture

Trust is the foundation of peer support. Every policy, procedure, communication strategy, and operational decision reinforces confidentiality, professionalism, and confidence in the program.

Phase 1: Planning and Program Development

This establishes a strong foundation for the peer support program by assessing agency needs, identifying existing resources, establishing program goals, developing policies and procedures, and preparing the agency for successful implementation. Effective peer support programs require thoughtful planning, collaboration, and agency commitment.

Step 1: Conduct an Agency Assessment

Before developing the peer support program, assess your agency's current environment, available resources, and personnel needs. This assessment will help identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities to develop a program that aligns with the agency's culture and workforce needs.^{vii}

Assess Agency Needs

Understanding the challenges personnel experience is an important first step in designing an effective peer support program. Consider types of stressors, wellness concerns, critical incidents, and gaps in available support.^{viii ix}

Assess: ☐ Agency challenges and operational stressors ☐ Critical incident history ☐ Personnel wellness concerns ☐ Gaps in existing support ☐ Barriers to seeking support	Questions to Consider: • What challenges are employees experiencing? • Where are gaps in support? • What prevents employees from seeking support? • What types of support are needed?
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Consider how different situations may require different levels or types of support. The appropriate response should be determined based on the individual's needs, agency protocols, available resources, and the scope of peer support.^x

Assess Existing Resources

A strong peer support program builds upon resources and relationships that already exist within the agency and community. Agencies should identify existing strengths, available resources, and areas where additional support may be needed.^{xi}

Assess ☐ Wellness initiatives ☐ Employee Assistance Program (EAP) ☐ Chaplain resources ☐ Mental health partners ☐ Community partners ☐ Funding ☐ Staffing and program capacity	Questions to Consider: • What wellness and support resources already exist? • How are personnel currently accessing support? • What existing relationships can support the program? • Are referral resources available when needed? • What resources are available to support implementation?
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Successful programs begin with understanding agency needs, resources, and culture.

Assess Agency Culture

Agency culture can influence whether personnel trust, access, and participate in a peer support program.^{xii} Communication during the assessment phase can establish transparency, build trust, and demonstrate agency commitment to personnel wellness.^{xiii}

Assess: ☐ Trust in leadership ☐ Leadership support for wellness initiatives ☐ Stigma or concerns related to seeking support ☐ Personnel willingness to participate ☐ Opportunities for input	Potential Methods for Collecting Feedback Consider using ☐ Anonymous personnel surveys ☐ Focus groups ☐ Leadership briefings ☐ Team meetings ☐ Internal newsletters or messaging platforms
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**Be mindful that the chosen communication method may be subject to public disclosure under Kentucky Open Records or Open Meetings requirements. Agency legal counsel should be consulted regarding disclosure of public records.*

Step 2: Build the Peer Support Planning Team

Develop a collaborative planning structure that brings together key perspectives, establishes program direction, and ensures the peer support program reflects agency needs, operational realities, and workplace culture. The planning team guides development from concept through implementation and may include leadership, supervision, line personnel, dispatch, civilian personnel, and wellness or personnel-support functions, as applicable. Clearly defined roles help the team maintain accountability, coordinate activities, and communicate progress.^{xiv}

Include representatives from across the agency to build trust and reflect the needs of all personnel.

Planning Team Checklist:

- ☐ Ensure perspectives from across the agency are represented on the planning team
- ☐ Identify a program lead or coordinator
- ☐ Define roles and responsibilities
- ☐ Establish meeting schedule and expectations
- ☐ Establish decision-making process
- ☐ Define communication responsibilities
- ☐ Establish timelines and deliverables

Planning Team Transition

Consider whether the Peer Support Planning team will transition into a standing Peer Support Advisory Team after the peer support program launches. A Program Advisory Team can provide ongoing oversight, support continuous improvement, and help ensure the program remains aligned with agency goals and personnel needs.^{xv}

The roles of these teams are distinct

Planning Team • Designs and develops the peer support program • Develops program structure, policies, and procedures • Guides implementation planning • Establishes the foundation for program launch	Peer Support Advisory Team • Provides ongoing program oversight • Supports continuous improvement and sustainability • Reviews program needs and strategic direction • Helps maintain alignment with agency goals and personnel needs
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Step 3: Develop Program Purpose, Goals, and Agency Buy-In

Define the purpose and scope of the peer support program, establish goals that guide program development, and build support across the agency. A clear purpose and defined goals help align peer support with agency needs, personnel wellness, and available resources.^{xvi xvii xviii}

Develop Program Purpose Define the purpose and scope of the peer support program, including the needs it is intended to address and how it will support agency personnel.	Consider: ☐ Define the purpose of the program ☐ Define the scope of peer support ☐ Identify the needs the program is intended to address ☐ Consider how peer support fits within the agency's broader wellness strategy
Establish Program Goals Clearly defined goals help identify priorities and guide program development. Goals can address both immediate program needs and longer-term sustainability.	Goals may include: ☐ Developing program structure and procedures ☐ Preparing and training Peer Support Specialists ☐ Increasing awareness of support resources ☐ Establishing referral pathways ☐ Improving access to support ☐ Strengthening organizational resilience ☐ Supporting personnel recruitment and retention efforts
Program Objectives Identify specific actions needed to achieve program goals	Objectives and measures of success may include: ☐ Program participation and utilization ☐ Training completion ☐ Personnel feedback ☐ Program accessibility ☐ Peer Support Team readiness ☐ Overall program improvement

Successful peer support programs require visible leadership support and everyday interactions that encourage wellness, build trust, and normalize seeking support.

Building Leadership and Agency Buy-In

Leadership support is essential to establish trust and demonstrate that peer support is a valued part of the agency culture. Support extends beyond program approval and includes visible engagement throughout development, implementation, and ongoing operations.^{xix}

Executive Leadership ☐ Support program development ☐ Provide necessary resources ☐ Communicate the importance of personnel wellness ☐ Reinforce confidentiality and trust	Supervisors ☐ Understand the purpose and scope of peer support ☐ Encourage appropriate use of support resources ☐ Support personnel who seek assistance
Peer Support Team ☐ Communicate purpose and scope of the program ☐ Clarify confidentiality expectations and limitations ☐ Address concerns about participation ☐ Explain how personnel can access support	Trusted Messengers Consider engaging individuals who are trusted and respected within the agency to help communicate the value of peer support and address questions or concerns.

Step 4: Design the Program

Design a peer support program that aligns with your agency's size, resources, organizational structure, and operational needs. Establish the program framework, partnerships, referral networks, and support systems needed for effective implementation and long-term sustainability.

Design a Program That Fits Your Agency

Peer support programs can be successfully adapted to agencies of all sizes and structures by designing a program that aligns with available resources and organizational capacity.^{xx} Agencies may begin with a limited scope, such as one-on-one peer support or post-critical incident response—and expand services over time as staffing, training, resources, and agency support grow. A phased approach allows agencies to establish a sustainable foundation while working toward a more comprehensive wellness program.

Determine the Program Structure

The program structure establishes accountability, clarifies responsibilities, and supports consistent operations. The structure can reflect the agency's size, available resources, and operational needs. In smaller agencies, one individual may fulfill multiple roles.^{xxi xxii}

Program Component	Primary Role
Program Leadership	Provides strategic direction and program oversight
Peer Support Team Members	Delivers peer support services and help maintain program operations
Clinical Advisor	Provides clinical consultation and referral guidance
Chaplain	Provides spiritual support, when appropriate
Administrative Support	Coordinates records, scheduling, and logistics
Regional Partners	Expands support through interagency collaboration

Build Partnerships and Referral Networks

Strong partnerships expand available resources, improve access to expertise, and support program sustainability.^{xxiii xxiv}

Partnerships with neighboring agencies can improve program capacity, particularly for smaller or rural agencies.

Potential Partners

- Neighboring agencies
- Regional peer support teams
- Clinical advisors
- Mental health providers
- Employee Assistance Programs
- Chaplain services
- Family support resources

Clinical Advisor

A Clinical Advisor can provide consultation, training, referral guidance, and clinical expertise while maintaining the distinction between peer support and clinical care.^{xxv}

Responsibilities may include:

- ☐ Advising on referral resources and processes
- ☐ Consulting on complex or high-risk situations
- ☐ Supporting training and continuing education
- ☐ Advising program leadership and Peer Support Specialists
- ☐ Reviewing relevant policies and procedures

Integrate with Existing Wellness Services

Peer support is most effective when integrated into the agency’s broader wellness strategy rather than operating as a stand-alone initiative. Connecting peer support with existing services can reduce duplication, strengthen coordination, and support long-term program sustainability.^{xxvi}

Develop a Referral Process

Understanding that peer support does not replace clinical or specialized care, establish trusted referral relationships and a consistent process for connecting personnel to appropriate clinical and specialized services, as well as additional resources. Whenever practical, use a warm handoff rather than simply providing contact information. Advance referral relationships reduce barriers, minimize delays, and create a smoother path to additional support.^{xxvii}

When developing the referral network:

- ☐ Identify and vet referral resources before making recommendations
- ☐ Establish contact with providers and understand their services, referral process, availability, and experience working with law enforcement personnel
- ☐ Confirm resources are accessible, timely, and appropriate for agency personnel
- ☐ Establish relationships with providers before referrals are needed

The referral process may include:

- ☐ How referrals are initiated
- ☐ When referrals are appropriate
- ☐ Warm handoff procedures
- ☐ Follow-up responsibilities
- ☐ Documentation requirements
- ☐ Emergency referral procedures

Identify Mental Health and Community Resources

Mental Health When identifying mental health providers, consider clinicians who understand the culture, operational demands, and occupational stressors associated with law enforcement. ^{xxviii} Consider: ☐ Experience working with law enforcement personnel ☐ Evidence-based and trauma-informed services ☐ Established referral procedures ☐ Crisis response availability ☐ Insurance/payment options ☐ Family services ☐ Inpatient and outpatient services ☐ Substance use treatment resources	Community Resources Complement peer support by addressing additional wellness needs. Examples include: • Gyms and nutritional wellness organizations • Financial planning resources • Family support organizations • Veteran resources • Faith-based organizations • Local community resources
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Technology and Resource Tools

Technology can improve access to peer support services and referral resources by making information readily available when personnel need it.^{xxix}

Consider tools that may improve accessibility while maintaining confidentiality and aligning with agency policies and procedures, such as: ☐ Confidential phone line ☐ Wellness app ☐ Resource directory ☐ Crisis resources ☐ Secure communication platform

Recognize Existing Informal Peer Support Networks

Many agencies already have informal peer support networks in which personnel seek out trusted colleagues during times of stress or personal challenge. These existing relationships can provide valuable insight when designing a formal peer support program. Formal peer support programs can build upon these relationships while ensuring selected Peer Support Specialists receive appropriate training, supervision, and ongoing support.^{xxx}

Develop a Budget and Identify Funding

Identify costs and funding sources to support implementation and long-term sustainability. While many agencies can operate peer support programs with minimal costs beyond personnel time, agencies are encouraged to identify potential expenses early and develop a sustainable funding strategy.^{xxxi xxxii}

Potential expenses: • Training and continuing education • Technology • Overtime • Program awareness and outreach • Equipment and supplies	Potential funding sources: • Agency budget • Wellness budget • State or local funding • Federal grants • Private foundation grants
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Step 5: Develop Policies and Procedures

Develop clear policies and procedures that define how the peer support program will operate, establish expectations and accountability, protect confidentiality, and promote consistent, ethical service delivery.^{xxxiii}

Review Applicable Laws and Legal Considerations

Before developing program policies and procedures, review applicable laws, regulations, and legal considerations with agency or jurisdiction's legal counsel to ensure the program aligns with statutory requirements and agency obligations.

Consider:

- State and federal law
- Confidentiality requirements
- Documentation
- Mandatory reporting
- Other applicable legal requirements

Develop Agency Policy

Agency policy establishes the authority, scope, requirements, and expectations for the peer support program and defines how the program will operate within the agency.^{xxxiv}

The policy can address:

- ☐ Program purpose and scope
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities
- ☐ Peer Support Specialist qualifications and selection
- ☐ Training requirements
- ☐ Confidentiality expectations, limitations, and exceptions
- ☐ Documentation requirements
- ☐ Participation and access
- ☐ Professional boundaries
- ☐ Social media and public communications expectations
- ☐ Conflict-of-interest expectations
- ☐ Legal requirements

Clear policies and procedures promote consistency, protect confidentiality, and strengthen confidence in the Peer Support Program.

Establish Participation Guidelines

Clarify how personnel access peer support services and how peer support interacts with other agency processes. Access may include self-request, coworker request, supervisor referral, or an automatic offer following qualifying critical incidents. Peer support participation does not replace mandatory fitness-for-duty evaluations, administrative procedures, or other required agency processes.

Address Conflicts of Interest

Develop procedures for circumstances in which providing peer support may compromise trust, professional boundaries, or impartiality. Assign another Peer Support Specialist whenever possible to preserve trust, maintain appropriate boundaries, and ensure effective support.^{xxxv xxxvi}

Examples may include:

- Family or romantic relationship (current or former)
- Supervisory relationships, when appropriate
- Direct involvement in the same critical incident
- Active administrative or criminal investigations
- Personal or financial conflicts
- Any other circumstance that could affect the ability to provide unbiased support

Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) differs from agency policy. Policy establishes authority, expectations, and requirements, while the SOP provides the operational details to carry out the program. An SOP can identify responsibilities, procedures, documentation, training requirements, and points of contact for program operations.^{xxxvii}

The SOP can address:

Team Operations ☐ Application or recruitment process ☐ Team responsibilities ☐ Training requirements ☐ Annual review process ☐ Membership changes	Team Activation and Response ☐ Activation criteria ☐ Authorized activation methods ☐ Activation procedures ☐ Interagency assistance ☐ Large-scale or multi-agency incident response ☐ Deactivation procedures ☐ Follow-up responsibilities
Referral and Resource ☐ Referral process ☐ Contact lists ☐ Resource lists	Administrative Procedures ☐ File management ☐ Record storage ☐ Program documentation

Begin communicating about peer support before the program launches. Early, consistent messaging helps reduce uncertainty, addresses misconceptions, and builds confidence in the program.

Manage Peer Support Team Membership Changes

Establish procedures for changes in Peer Support Team membership to maintain program integrity, accountability, and trust. Procedures can address circumstances that may require a change in team membership, such as voluntary resignation, inability to fulfill team responsibilities, or conduct that compromises the integrity of the program.

Agencies can also establish a process for reviewing concerns involving Peer Support Specialists, including who conducts the review, applicable confidentiality protections, potential corrective actions or removal from the team, and an appeal process, as needed.^{xxxviii}

Step 6: Recruit and Select Peer Support Team Members

Recruit and select Peer Support Specialists who demonstrate the integrity, professionalism, communication skills, and commitment necessary to provide trusted and effective peer support. Agencies can consider candidates' current job performance, interpersonal strengths, and ability to fulfill Peer Support Specialist responsibilities when developing eligibility and selection criteria.^{xxxix xl xli}

The recruitment and selection process can be formal or informal, depending on what best fits the agency’s program, structure, culture, and needs.^{xlii}

- Consider selection criteria such as:
- ☐ Credibility and trustworthiness

☐ Communication and active listening skills

☐ Emotional maturity and sound judgment

☐ Ability to maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries

☐ Appropriate experience and understanding of the agency

☐ Positive and effective job performance

☐ Diversity of representation across the agency

☐ Willingness to participate in ongoing training and program responsibilities

Select individuals who are trusted, approachable, and committed to supporting others with professionalism and integrity.

Step 7: Train the Team

Training Plan

Develop a training plan that aligns with the agency’s peer support approach, program structure, operational needs, and available resources and prepares Peer Support Specialists for the specific responsibilities and services they will provide. Training topics can reflect applicable state and national best practices.^{xliii}

Training is an ongoing process. Continuing education helps Peer Support Specialists maintain skills and respond to evolving needs.

- When developing a training plan, consider operational needs, such as:
- ☐ Training schedule and availability

☐ Staffing coverage during training

☐ Training costs

☐ Documentation of completed training

Initial training

Prepare Peer Support Specialists to provide ethical, confidential, and effective peer support through training that develops peer support skills, crisis response capabilities, knowledge of agency resources, and an understanding of the boundaries of the peer support role.^{xliv} Initial training establishes a consistent foundation for Peer Support Specialists and prepares them for their responsibilities.^{xlvi xlvii xlviii}

Topics may include:		
Core Skills	Crisis and Specialized Skills	Agency and Program Skills
☐ Basic Peer Support ☐ Active listening ☐ Ethics ☐ Trustworthiness ☐ Professional boundaries ☐ Cultural responsiveness ☐ Referral skills	☐ Crisis intervention ☐ Trauma awareness ☐ Psychological First Aid ☐ Suicide prevention ☐ ASIST/QPR ☐ CISM^{xlix} ☐ Other specialized training	☐ Documentation expectations ☐ Referral procedures ☐ Agency resources ☐ Program policies ☐ Annual refresher training

Ongoing Training

Training is an ongoing process. Continuing education helps Peer Support Specialists maintain skills, stay informed of best practices, respond to evolving needs, and continue supporting personnel effectively.^l

Designate Peer Support Specialists

For agencies establishing a formal Peer Support Team, designate individuals who have completed the agency's selection and training requirements and meet established qualifications to serve as Peer Support Specialists. A consistent designation process helps clarify who is authorized to serve in the role and reinforces confidence in the peer support program.^{li}

Example Designation Process^{lii}

Application or nomination →	Interview or selection process →	Selection review →	Leadership approval →	Training →	Designation
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Phase 1 Communication Considerations

Communication needs may vary by agency, audience, and stage of development. Consider using communication methods that fit the agency and provide personnel with clear, consistent, and appropriate information throughout the planning process.

Planning Stage	Communication Focus
Agency Assessment	Explain why the assessment is being conducted and provide appropriate opportunities for personnel input and feedback.
Planning Team	Share the purpose and role of the planning team and consider how perspectives from across the agency are represented.
Vision, Goals and Buy-In	Communicate the purpose and goals of the proposed peer support program and build understanding among leadership and personnel.
Program Design	Provide appropriate updates as program structure, services, partnerships, and access are developed.
Policies and Procedures	Consider how to communicate key policies, confidentiality expectations, professional boundaries, and the scope of peer support as they are established.
Recruitment and Selection	Communicate recruitment opportunities, general selection expectations, and the role of Peer Support Specialists.
Training and Preparation	Share appropriate information about training and program readiness as the agency prepares for implementation.

Phase 2: Implementation and Program Launch

This phase transitions the peer support program from planning to implementation by ensuring policies, procedures, personnel, resources, and communication strategies are in place for a strong rollout. Effective implementation involves more than announcing a new program; visible leadership, ongoing communication, and continued engagement help build trust and encourage use of the program.^{liii liv}

Step 1: Final Readiness Review

Conduct a final readiness review to confirm that essential program components are complete and operational before launch.

Review the following:

- ☐ Policies approved
- ☐ Standard Operating Procedures finalized
- ☐ Peer Support Team selected
- ☐ Team training completed
- ☐ Resources confirmed
- ☐ Referral network established and tested
- ☐ Leadership briefed
- ☐ Communication materials finalized
- ☐ Program Coordinator and team responsibilities confirmed

Before launch, consider whether any remaining gaps could affect program access, operations, or communication.

Step 2: Launch the Program

Introduce the Peer Support Team in a way that builds awareness, establishes trust, and encourages personnel to access available support. The launch provides an opportunity to demonstrate leadership commitment, explain the role and availability of the Peer Support Team, and establish confidence in the program.

Consider a Soft Launch

Agencies may choose to conduct a limited rollout before announcing the program agency-wide. A soft launch allows the Peer Support Team to become familiar with procedures, identify operational issues, and make adjustments before full implementation.

Examples include:

- Pilot within one division or shift
- Limited operational period
- Testing referral procedures
- Gathering initial feedback

Consistent communication keeps peer support visible, reinforces trust, and reminds personnel that seeking support is a sign of strength.

Prepare Supervisors

Supervisors are often the first point of contact for personnel experiencing stress. Preparing supervisors can promote consistent information, reinforce appropriate use of the program, and support confidence in available resources.

Before launch, supervisors should understand:

- ☐ Purpose of peer support
- ☐ Scope and limitations
- ☐ Confidentiality
- ☐ Referral procedures
- ☐ How to encourage appropriate use

Official Rollout

Launch activities may include:^{lv}

- ☐ Leadership announcement
- ☐ Roll-call briefing
- ☐ Introduction of the Peer Support Team
- ☐ Explanation of confidentiality and its limitations
- ☐ Information on how to access the Peer Support Team
- ☐ Distribution of Peer Support Program materials
- ☐ Opportunity for personnel questions and feedback

Program Coordinator Responsibilities

The Program Coordinator helps maintain program visibility, coordinate program activities, build trust through regular engagement, and monitor implementation challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Step 3: Develop an Ongoing Communication Plan

Develop a sustainable communication strategy that maintains awareness, reinforces trust, and encourages ongoing use of peer support services. Consistent communication beyond the initial launch can help normalize peer support, reinforce confidentiality, and maintain awareness of available resources.

Trusted Messengers

Identify trusted messengers throughout the agency. Consider engaging command staff, supervisors, Peer Support Specialists, and other respected personnel to reinforce program awareness and credibility.

Communication Methods^{lvi}

Consider communication methods that fit the agency and audience.

Method options may include:

- ☐ Roll-call presentations
- ☐ Leadership talking points
- ☐ Posters or wallet cards
- ☐ Email or intranet updates
- ☐ New personnel orientation
- ☐ Team meetings
- ☐ Social media, when appropriate
- ☐ Family communication, when appropriate

Consider reinforcing messages that:

- ☐ Normalize peer support
- ☐ Reduce stigma
- ☐ Explain how to access support
- ☐ Reinforce confidentiality
- ☐ Clarify the scope and limitations of peer support
- ☐ Emphasize that seeking support can be part of maintaining wellness and resilience

Step 4: Early Operations

During the first 90 days, monitor early program implementation, identify opportunities for improvement, and strengthen program operations. This period provides an opportunity to identify challenges and make adjustments before transitioning to routine operations.

Initial Peer Support Contact

Agencies can establish a consistent approach for initial peer support contacts.

General guidance:

- ☐ Introduce yourself
- ☐ Explain confidentiality expectations and limitations
- ☐ Build rapport
- ☐ Assess immediate safety concerns
- ☐ Identify needs and priorities
- ☐ Provide support
- ☐ Make referrals when appropriate
- ☐ Follow up as needed

Team Operations^{lvii lviii}

- ☐ Hold regular Peer Support Team meetings
- ☐ Monitor program utilization and referral patterns
- ☐ Gather personnel feedback and identify barriers to participation
- ☐ Monitor team workload, wellness, and sustainability
- ☐ Identify operational challenges or resource gaps
- ☐ Identify training needs
- ☐ Review communication effectiveness
- ☐ Address challenges and adjust implementation as needed
- ☐ Provide appropriate updates to leadership

Leadership Reinforcement

Agency leaders can continue to support the program by:

- ☐ Mentioning the program during meetings
- ☐ Encouraging appropriate use of available resources
- ☐ Reinforcing confidentiality and trust
- ☐ Recognizing the contributions of Peer Support Specialists

Early feedback is essential.
Use the first 90 days to identify
challenges, strengthen
operations, and build
confidence in the program.

Phase 2 Communication Considerations

Communication during implementation helps personnel understand what the program offers, how to access it, and what they can expect. Consistent messaging, trusted messengers, and communication methods that reach personnel across shifts and work locations can help build awareness and trust.

Implementation Stage	Communication Focus
Program Launch	Announce the program and communicate its purpose, scope, availability, and leadership support.
Program Access and Expectations	Provide clear information about how personnel can access peer support, confidentiality and its limitations, professional boundaries, referral resources, and the distinction between peer support and administrative processes.
Building Awareness and Trust	Use consistent messaging to normalize seeking support, reduce stigma, reinforce confidentiality, and build confidence in the program. Consider opportunities for positive peer-to-peer communication and informal engagement across shifts and work locations.
Early Implementation	Provide reminders about how to access support, invite feedback, share appropriate updates and early successes, and communicate adjustments or improvements as the program develops. Recognize successes and use existing communication channels to maintain visibility.

Phase 3: Sustaining the Program

Phase 3 sustains a healthy, effective peer support program by supporting Peer Support Team members, maintaining operational readiness, strengthening communication, and embedding peer support into the agency culture. Long-term sustainability requires continued leadership support, team wellness, training, communication, evaluation, and integration into the agency's broader wellness strategy.^{lix}

Step 1: Responsibilities of the Peer Support Team

Provide Peer Support Specialists with clear expectations regarding their role, responsibilities, boundaries, and response procedures. Peer Support Specialists provide confidential, non-clinical support while helping agency personnel identify resources and connections to additional services when needed.

Routine Peer Support

Routine peer support may include:

- One-on-one support
- Wellness check-ins
- Self-referrals
- Supervisor referrals
- Peer-initiated outreach
- Follow-up contacts

A successful peer support program requires ongoing investment in people, relationships, communication, and organizational commitment, not just policies and procedures.

Peer Support Contact

Agencies can establish a consistent approach for initial peer support contacts and follow-up. This may include a documentation process for Peer Support Specialists to record contact attempts and relevant non-identifying information in accordance with agency policy and confidentiality requirements.

The following checklists provide examples of activities and follow-up timeframes that agencies can adapt based on individual needs, level of concern, circumstances, and agency procedures.

Initial Peer Support Contact Checklist ☐ Introduce self ☐ Explain confidentiality ☐ Explain limits of confidentiality ☐ Establish rapport ☐ Ensure privacy ☐ Assess immediate safety ☐ Identify immediate needs ☐ Provide emotional support ☐ Provide resources, as needed ☐ Offer referral options ☐ Develop a follow-up plan ☐ Document non-identifying information	Follow-Up Checklist ☐ Within 24 hours, if needed: - Provide an immediate check-in following a significant concern ☐ Within 72 hours, if needed: - Continue support and assist with resource connections ☐ Within one week: - Check in to assess ongoing needs ☐ Additional follow-up: - Schedule as needed based on individual circumstances ☐ Referral follow-up: - Confirm referral completion, when applicable
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Team Activation Support may be provided following significant events. Responses can occur within the scope of training, agency procedures, and established response protocols. Examples may include: • Defusing or initial support following an incident • Debriefing activities, when consistent with agency policy and appropriate training • Hospital support • Family support • Officer-involved shootings • Line-of-duty deaths • Major incidents	High-Risk Situations and Emergency Response A high-risk response protocol is an important operational tool to help Peer Support Specialists recognize situations requiring immediate action or additional resources. Topics may include: • Recognizing high-risk situations • Suicide concerns • Substance use concerns • Threats of violence • Mandatory reporting requirements • Emergency activation procedures • Emergency contact information • Listen and Refer approach
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Resource Navigation

Peer Support Specialists will need access to a current referral and resource directory and established referral procedures. Agencies can periodically review and update resources to confirm they remain appropriate, accessible, and available.

Resources may include:

- ☐ Mental health professionals
- ☐ Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- ☐ Inpatient treatment resources
- ☐ Outpatient counseling
- ☐ Substance use treatment
- ☐ Community resources
- ☐ Family resources
- ☐ Financial or other support resources

Meeting Environment

Whenever possible, peer support conversations should occur in an environment that promotes privacy, trust, and confidentiality.^{lx lxi lxii}

Consider:

- ☐ Private location
- ☐ Comfortable setting
- ☐ Free from interruptions
- ☐ Away from supervisors
- ☐ Away from command staff
- ☐ Neutral environment
- ☐ Not an interview room or disciplinary setting

**This is practical guidance rather than policy.*

Professional Boundaries

Peer Support Specialists provide emotional support, active listening, resource navigation, and encouragement within the established scope of peer support.

The role of a Peer Support Specialist is to:	Peer Support Specialists should not:
✓ Listen ✓ Support ✓ Encourage ✓ Connect ✓ Follow up	✗ Diagnose ✗ Treat ✗ Provide clinical counseling

Supporting the supporters is essential.

Step 2: Supporting Peer Support Specialists

Supporting Peer Support Team members promotes wellness, helps prevent burnout, and supports their ability to effectively serve others, which is essential to maintaining program effectiveness.^{lxiii lxiv}

Team Wellness	Burnout Prevention
Consider: • Regular wellness check-ins • Team debriefings • Opportunities for time away from peer support responsibilities • Monitoring workload and emotional impact	Strategies may include: • Rotating peer support responsibilities when needed • Encouraging use of available support resources • Recognizing signs of compassion fatigue or burnout • Providing access to clinical consultation when appropriate

Clinical consultation
Clinical consultation may be provided through the program's designated Clinical Advisor or another qualified mental health professional, consistent with agency procedures.
Clinical consultation may help Peer Support Specialists: • Process challenging situations • Identify appropriate referral options • Maintain professional boundaries • Support ethical decision-making

Step 3: Ongoing Training

Maintain Peer Support Team readiness through continued education, skill development, and current best practices. Training can evolve to support ongoing skill development and readiness.

Ongoing training may include: • Annual education requirements • Advanced peer support training • Trauma education • Suicide prevention • Family support • Ethics • Scenario-based training • Conferences • Regional collaboration opportunities

Initial training prepares Peer Support Specialists to begin their role. Ongoing training keeps the team prepared, confident, and effective.

Step 4: Team Operations

Maintain effective program operations through regular team coordination, oversight, and continuous improvement. As the program transitions into routine operations, ongoing coordination can help identify needs, address challenges, and support program readiness.

Regular team meetings can address: ☐ Resource and referral updates ☐ SOP or policy updates ☐ Training needs ☐ Partnerships and referral relationships ☐ Operational challenges ☐ Team wellness and workload ☐ Opportunities for program improvement	Responsibilities may include: ☐ Review program goals and outcomes ☐ Evaluate utilization trends ☐ Review policies and SOPs ☐ Assess training needs ☐ Review resources and partnerships ☐ Monitor team wellness ☐ Recommend program improvements ☐ Assist with succession planning ☐ Support funding strategies
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Succession Planning

Agencies can plan for transitions in Peer Support Specialists and program leadership to support ongoing program operations.

Consider: ☐ Identifying future Peer Support Specialists ☐ Maintaining recruitment processes ☐ Cross-training team members ☐ Documenting program procedures ☐ Preparing for Program Coordinator transitions
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A sustainable program requires oversight beyond individual Peer Support Specialists. Regular review helps ensure the program continues to meet agency needs.

Step 5: Embedding Peer Support into Organizational Structure^{lxv}

Integrate peer support into everyday agency operations so it remains a visible and accessible resource throughout an employee's career, rather than one used only during a crisis. Regular communication and awareness can help reinforce peer support as part of the agency's culture of wellness.

Integrate Peer Support Awareness Into: ☐ New personnel orientation ☐ Recruit academy or field training ☐ Supervisor development training ☐ Annual in-service training ☐ Wellness training ☐ Leadership meetings ☐ Benefits or wellness events ☐ Agency newsletters or intranet ☐ Family orientation events	Supervisor Engagement Supervisors support sustainability by: • Sharing resource information • Encouraging appropriate use • Reducing stigma • Supporting personnel seeking assistance
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Phase 3 Communication Considerations

Focus	Communication Consideration
Maintaining Awareness	Consider periodic reminders that peer support is available during routine periods as well as following significant events. Communication can help ensure awareness reaches personnel across shifts, assignments, and locations.
Normalizing Peer Support	Consider consistent messaging that reinforces key program messages, such as positive peer-to-peer communication and normalization of conversations about stress, resilience, and wellness.
Ongoing Access and Resources	Consider keeping information about how to access peer support and available referral resources current and easy to find.
Leadership Support	Consider periodic leadership messaging that demonstrates continued support for peer support and personnel wellness.
Team and Program Updates	Consider sharing appropriate updates about program activities, training, resources, and partnerships.
Feedback and Continuous Improvement	Consider providing appropriate opportunities for personnel and Peer Support Specialists to share feedback and identify ways communication can improve awareness and access.

Consider what communication tools best fit the agency:

- ☐ Roll-call presentations
- ☐ Email/intranet announcements or newsletters
- ☐ New employee orientation
- ☐ Ongoing wellness campaigns
- ☐ Posters or wallet cards
- ☐ Informal conversations

Personnel benefit from hearing about peer support throughout their careers, not only when they are experiencing a challenge.

Phase 4: Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Phase 4 focuses on assessing program effectiveness, strengthening trust and accessibility, and ensuring the peer support program continues to evolve with agency needs.^{lxvi} Regular evaluations can identify what is working, address barriers, and inform ongoing improvements.^{lxvii}

Step 1: Develop an Evaluation Plan

Develop an evaluation plan that identifies what information will be reviewed, how it will be collected, and how findings will be used to strengthen the peer support program.

Key Evaluation Questions Agencies can consider:

- ☐ Do personnel know the program exists and understand how to access it?
- ☐ Do personnel trust the program and understand confidentiality expectations?
- ☐ Can personnel easily access support when needed?
- ☐ Are Peer Support Specialists supported and prepared to fulfill their roles?
- ☐ Are policies, resources, referral processes, and partnerships functioning effectively?
- ☐ What barriers or opportunities for improvement have been identified?

Evaluation is not simply about determining whether a program succeeds or fails. It is an opportunity to understand what is working, identify challenges and opportunities, and incorporate meaningful improvements.

Evaluation Area	Examples of Measures
Awareness	Surveys, orientation feedback, personnel awareness
Accessibility	Contact methods, response times, barriers to participation
Trust	Anonymous feedback, perceptions of confidentiality and credibility
Program Utilization	Contact volume and trends, types of support provided, referral activity
Sustainability	Team wellness, resources, partnerships, leadership support

Evaluation Planning Considerations

- ☐ What information will be collected?
- ☐ Who will be responsible for collecting and reviewing information?
- ☐ How often will information be reviewed?
- ☐ How will confidentiality be protected?
- ☐ How will findings be shared and used to inform program improvements?
- ☐ Who is responsible for reviewing findings and approving program changes

Example Program Tracking Form

A confidential, non-identifying tracking process provides a way for agencies to monitor program activity while protecting privacy.^{lxviii lxxix}

- Date
- Type of contact
- General topic or category of support
- Referral made
- Resource provided
- High-risk concern identified
- Follow-up completed

Step 2: Gather Feedback and Assess the Program

Regular feedback can help agencies understand how the peer support program is functioning and whether it continues to meet agency and personnel needs.^{10x}

Including feedback from individuals who have not used the program can help identify barriers, awareness gaps, or concerns that may affect participation.

Feedback can come from multiple perspectives, including:

- ☐ Peer Support Team members
- ☐ Agency leadership
- ☐ Personnel who have utilized peer support
- ☐ Personnel who have not utilized peer support

Collect both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate program effectiveness. Quantitative data identifies measurable trends such as awareness, utilization, accessibility, and participation, while qualitative feedback provides context about personnel experiences, perceptions, barriers, trust, and opportunities for improvement.

Example Questions

Quantitative: What is happening?	Qualitative: What are personnel experiencing?
- Are you aware that the peer support program exists? - Do you know how to contact a Peer Support Specialist? - Have you utilized peer support services? - Do you feel the program is accessible when needed? Privacy Consideration: Design questions to avoid collecting information that could reasonably identify individual respondents, particularly in small agencies.	- What factors influence whether you would seek peer support? - What, if anything, prevents personnel from using peer support services? - What aspects of the program have been helpful? - What could improve trust or confidence in the program? - How can the agency better communicate information about peer support? - What additional resources or support would be helpful? Review evaluation findings to identify program strengths, challenges, and opportunities to improve accessibility, trust, and overall effectiveness.

Feedback Collection

Feedback from multiple perspectives provides a more complete understanding of program effectiveness. While Step 2 identifies what to evaluate, this step focuses on methods agencies can use to gather feedback from personnel and other stakeholders. Evaluation questions can assess program accessibility, trust, effectiveness, and opportunities for improvement.

Gather feedback from:	Methods may include:	Feedback may be collected at intervals appropriate to the agency, such as:
☐ Peer Support Team members ☐ Leadership ☐ Personnel who have utilized peer support ☐ General agency personnel	☐ Anonymous surveys ☐ Focus groups ☐ Interviews ☐ Informal feedback opportunities	☐ Annually ☐ Following major program changes ☐ After significant activations ☐ During strategic planning reviews

Step 3: Use Findings to Strengthen the Program

Evaluation is most useful when findings are translated into practical improvements. Agencies can review identified strengths, challenges, trends, and gaps and determine whether changes are needed.

Review: ☐ Trends ☐ Gaps ☐ Training needs ☐ Resource needs ☐ Communication effectiveness ☐ Team wellness ☐ Burnout indicators ☐ Program utilization patterns	Develop improvement recommendations by identifying: ☐ Areas of strength ☐ Areas needing additional support ☐ Changes needed to improve effectiveness ☐ Priorities for action ☐ Responsible person, team, or organizational unit ☐ Target completion dates
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Step 4: Maintain Program Health

Continuous improvement is an important and planned part of maintaining a successful peer support program.^{lxvi} When an existing process is not effective, agencies can modify the approach rather than continue ineffective practices.

Continuous Improvement

The continuous improvement process can follow a simple cycle:

Evaluate → Identify Needs → Make Improvements → Communicate Changes → Evaluate Again

Revise as needed: ☐ Policy ☐ Standard Operating Procedures ☐ Training ☐ Communication Plan ☐ Resource directory ☐ Partnerships ☐ Team membership ☐ Evaluation process	When changes are made: ☐ Update applicable agency policies and Standard Operating Procedures, training, or resources, and note revision dates ☐ Communicate relevant changes to the Peer Support Team ☐ Communicate applicable changes to agency personnel
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Evaluation and Improvement Checklists

After significant peer support activations, consider capturing information about what worked well, what was challenging, and what could be improved. Collecting information while the experience is fresh can provide more reliable information for later program evaluation and improvement. Document only program-level observations, lessons learned, and recommendations.

Event Information ☐ Incident type documented ☐ Date recorded ☐ Activation type identified	Review Process ☐ What went well identified ☐ Challenges identified ☐ Communication effectiveness reviewed ☐ Resource availability reviewed ☐ Referral process reviewed ☐ Confidentiality maintained	Improvement Actions ☐ Lessons learned documented ☐ Recommended changes recorded ☐ Action items assigned ☐ Follow-up date established
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Policy and Program Reviews^{boxii}

Annual reviews provide an opportunity to identify needed updates, address emerging challenges, and ensure the program continues to meet agency needs.

Annual Program Review Checklist	Program Evaluation Checklist
☐ Policies and standard operating procedures ☐ Confidentiality requirements ☐ Referral protocols ☐ Training requirements ☐ Resource directory ☐ Partnerships ☐ Activation process ☐ Staffing reviewed ☐ Budget reviewed ☐ Program goals updated ☐ Program forms and documentation ☐ Evaluation findings reviewed ☐ Team membership and responsibilities ☐ Improvement actions identified	☐ Program awareness reviewed ☐ Accessibility and barriers reviewed ☐ Personnel feedback collected ☐ Peer Support Team feedback collected ☐ Leadership feedback considered ☐ General utilization trends reviewed ☐ Team wellness and workload considered ☐ Training needs identified ☐ Referral resources and partnerships reviewed ☐ Communication effectiveness reviewed ☐ Policies and SOPs reviewed as needed ☐ Program goals reviewed ☐ Improvement opportunities identified ☐ Changes implemented and communicated as appropriate

Keeping the Program Going

Leadership, staffing, and organizational changes are a normal part of agency operations. Planning ahead can help the peer support program remain stable and continue with minimal disruption during transitions.^{boxiii boxiv}

Agencies can consider:

- ☐ Identifying responsibility for key program functions
- ☐ Planning for changes in Peer Support Specialists or program coordinators
- ☐ Keeping program information and resources organized and accessible
- ☐ Orienting new leadership to the program and its purpose
- ☐ Periodically reviewing program responsibilities and needs

Expanding the Program Over Time

Peer support programs can grow as agency needs, resources, and capacity develop. Expansion can occur gradually and reflect what is practical for the agency while maintaining the program's core principles.

Agencies may consider:

- ☐ Adding Peer Support Specialists as needs and capacity increase
- ☐ Developing specialized areas of peer support when appropriate
- ☐ Expanding regional or community partnerships
- ☐ Adding family support or other resources
- ☐ Increasing training opportunities
- ☐ Enhancing evaluation processes
- ☐ Integrating additional wellness initiatives

Common Challenges and Potential Approaches

Challenges may arise as agencies develop and maintain peer support programs. The following common challenges can help identify potential barriers and approaches for addressing them.^{boxv}

How do we keep the program working despite challenges and organizational change?

Challenge	Potential Approaches
Leadership Support	Keep leadership informed about program goals, progress, and needs. Consider identifying a leadership champion or incorporating peer support into existing leadership discussions.
Trust and Confidentiality	Select trusted Peer Support Specialists and clearly explain confidentiality, its limitations, and the voluntary nature of peer support. Maintain consistent professional boundaries.
Low Program Utilization	Consider awareness, accessibility, trust, and perceived need before viewing low utilization as a problem. Gather feedback to identify potential barriers.
Peer Support Specialist Burnout	Monitor workload and emotional demands. Consider team check-ins, consultation, rotation of responsibilities, and opportunities for time away.
Staffing and Funding Limitations	Start with a manageable scope and build over time. Consider partnerships, shared resources, and available training or funding opportunities.
Rural or Small Agency Considerations	Consider regional partnerships, shared resources, technology, and providers familiar with the needs of rural or small agencies.
Maintaining Momentum	Keep peer support visible through existing agency activities such as orientation, training, leadership communication, and periodic program review.

Phase 4 Communication Considerations

Communication during evaluation and continuous improvement can help maintain transparency, trust, and confidence in the program.

Sharing Findings	Consider how evaluation findings are communicated and share information that is useful to personnel and leadership.
Communicating Changes	When changes are made, consider communicating what is changing, why, and how the change may affect the program or access to services.
Maintaining Trust	Reinforce confidentiality and explain how evaluation information is used without identifying individual peer support contacts or participants.
Responding to Feedback	Consider communicating how appropriate feedback has informed program improvements.

Moving Forward

Developing and sustaining a peer support program is an ongoing process that requires commitment, collaboration, and continued attention to the needs of agency personnel. As agencies implement and maintain their programs, they are encouraged to assess what is working, identify opportunities for improvement, and adapt as personnel needs and organizational circumstances change.

A strong peer support program is one that grows with the agency while maintaining the core principles of trust, accessibility, sustainability, and responsiveness to personnel needs. The goal is not to create a program that looks the same in every agency, but to build an approach that provides meaningful support to the personnel it serves.

ADDITIONAL KENTUCKY RESOURCES

Resource	URL
Stand by the Badge Peer Support Resources Site	https://standbythebadge.ky.gov/ (must request access)
Kentucky Community Crisis Response Team	https://kccrt.ky.gov/Pages/index.aspx
Kentucky First Responder Peer Support	https://kyfrpst.org/
Kentucky Post-Critical Incident Seminar	https://www.kypcis.com/
Kentucky Department of Corrections Stress Debriefing	https://corrections.ky.gov/Divisions/healthservices

Resources

ⁱ Int'l Ass'n of Chiefs of Police, *Implementing Peer Support Services in Small and Rural Law Enforcement Agencies* (2023), <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-w0987-pub.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ In Kentucky, communications with peer support specialists is confidential (minus the excepted situations). See KRS 65.1591 for definitions and details. For the reader's convenience, the statute has been included in Appendix [insert letter].

ⁱⁱⁱ Int'l Ass'n of Chiefs of Police, IACP Police Psychological Services Section, *Peer Support Guidelines* (2016), <https://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/documents/pdfs/Psych-PeerSupportGuidelines.pdf>.

^{iv} Int'l Ass'n of Chiefs of Police, *Implementing Peer Support Services in Small and Rural Law Enforcement Agencies* (2023), <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-w0987-pub.pdf>.

^v Nat'l Emergency Number Association, Wellness Committee, Peer Support Work Group, *NENA Peer Support Team Development, Implementation, and Oversight* (April 21, 2021).

^{vi} See Int'l Ass'n of Chiefs of Police, IACP Police Psychological Services Section, *Peer Support Guidelines* (2016), <https://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/documents/pdfs/Psych-PeerSupportGuidelines.pdf>; Ky. Dep't for Behavioral Health, Developmental & Intellectual Disabilities, *Kentucky Public Safety Peer Support Best Practices Report*, <https://kccrt.ky.gov/PublishingImages/Pages/Peer%20Support%20Best%20Practices/Kentucky%20Public%20Safety%20Peer%20Support%20Best%20Practices%20Report.pdf> (last visited August 26, 2026); Nat'l Emergency Number Association, Wellness Committee, Peer Support Work Group, *NENA Peer Support Team Development, Implementation, and Oversight* (April 21, 2021).

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^{ix} Ky. Dep't for Behavioral Health, Developmental & Intellectual Disabilities, *Kentucky Public Safety Peer Support Best Practices Report*, <https://kccrt.ky.gov/PublishingImages/Pages/Peer%20Support%20Best%20Practices/Kentucky%20Public%20Safety%20Peer%20Support%20Best%20Practices%20Report.pdf> (last visited August 26, 2026).

^x Int'l Ass'n of Chiefs of Police, *Implementing Peer Support Services in Small and Rural Law Enforcement Agencies* (2023), <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/content.ashx/cops-w0987-pub.pdf>.

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- ^{xxiv} Int'l Ass'n of Chiefs of Police, *Comprehensive Framework for Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention*, https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/_NOSI_Framework_Final%20Copy%2001.pdf (last visited August 29, 2026).
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