County & Regional Peer Support Collaborative

A Toolkit for Building Shared Support Across Agencies

help for the HEADSET

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Purpose of This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help public safety agencies create a county-wide or regional peer support collaborative that strengthens individual agency teams, supports peer supporters, and builds shared capacity—especially during large-scale or cumulative critical incidents.

It is intentionally simple, adaptable, and relationship-centered, recognizing that sustainable peer support grows from trust.

What a Regional Peer Support Collaborative Is (and Is Not)

It IS:

- A connection point for peer support team members across agencies
- A space for shared learning, resources, and mutual aid
- A protective factor for peer supporters themselves
- A proactive support structure—not just crisis response

It IS NOT:

- A replacement for agency peer support teams
- A clinical group or therapy space
- A formal command structure
- A one-size-fits-all model

Section 1: Why This Matters

Peer support teams often operate in isolation, especially when:

- Agencies experience high-impact or cumulative incidents
- Peer supporters are part of those affected by such incidents and need the support themselves
- Peer supporters are supporting others while struggling themselves with non incident related issues
- Resources are uneven across jurisdictions

A county or regional collaborative:

- Expands support capacity without burning out one team
- Normalizes help-seeking across agency lines
- Creates trusted pathways *before* the next major event
- Reduces secondary trauma and compassion fatigue in peer supporters
- Mobilizes resources immediately in the wake of an event that goes beyond an agency's capacity

Section 2: Getting Started (Foundational Steps)

Step 1: Identify Initial Contacts

Start small.

- One peer support lead
- One wellness coordinator
- One trusted peer supporter

You only need one agency willing to initiate.

Step 2: Make the Invitation

Outreach works best when it's:

- Personal (email or phone, not mass blast)
- Informational, not directive
- Framed as support for peer supporters

Sample Invitation Language:

We're exploring a county-wide peer support connection for those already doing this work—nothing formal, just a consistent space to learn, share resources, and support each other when agencies are impacted. We'd love to see if this would be useful for your team as well.

Step 3: Keep the Commitment Realistic

- Monthly or bi-monthly meetings (even quarterly if necessary)
- 60–90 minutes
- Virtual or rotating host agencies (or take turns with one representative hosting for a specific time frame)
- Attendance encouraged, not mandatory

Section 3: Recommended Meeting Structure

Use a predictable, repeatable format so members know what to expect.

Sample Agenda (90 Minutes)

1. Welcome & brief check-in (10 min)
2. Focused topic or speaker (20–30 min)
3. Resource sharing (20 min)
4. Open discussion / peer connection (20–30 min)

Topics may include:

- Supporting peers after critical incidents
- Stress physiology & nervous system regulation
- Experience with different wellness resources (apps such as Lighthouse, Cordico, Mindbase etc)
- Clinician recommendations
- Funding sources
- Training classes/opportunities
- Boundary setting in peer support
- Supporting peer supporters
- Secondary trauma & cumulative stress
- Transitioning peers to outside resources

Section 4: Shared Values & Psychological Safety

Instead of rigid rules, agree on shared principles:

Core Values Checklist

☐ Confidentiality is respected
☐ Agency cultures are honored
☐ Peer support is not therapy
☐ No fixing, forcing, or diagnosing
☐ Boundaries are protective, not failures
☐ Mutual respect and non-judgment

These principles should be reviewed periodically and revisited after difficult events.

Section 5: Resource Sharing Framework

Encourage members to bring:

- Trusted clinicians or wellness providers
- Training opportunities
- Post-incident tools
- Lessons learned (what worked / what didn't)

Suggested Shared Resource Categories

- Culturally competent mental health providers
- Wellness coaching and peer support education
- Crisis response tools
- Family support resources
- Grants or funding opportunities

Over time, this becomes a resource library.

Section 6: Preparing for Large-Scale or Critical Incidents

One of the most valuable roles of a regional group is pre-incident planning.

Questions to Discuss *Before* the Next Event:

- How does an agency request outside peer support?
- What does outside support look like (presence, check-ins, debriefs)?
- How do we protect peer supporters from overload?
- Who coordinates communication?
- Setting up the ability to communicate to the entire group whether by email, Signal message, text chain, WhatsApp etc

Even informal agreements reduce confusion and strain during real events.

Section 7: Supporting the Supporters

Peer supporters are often the last to seek help.

Build in:

- Space to process being in the helper role
- Permission to step back when needed
- Peer-to-peer validation
- Education on secondary trauma and cumulative stress

A collaborative that supports peer supporters lasts longer and works better. It falls back on the inability of our peer supports to pour from an empty cup.

Section 8: Sustainability & Growth

Healthy collaboratives:

- Share leadership responsibilities
- Rotate speakers or facilitators
- Adapt structure as needs evolve
- Avoid over-formalization
- Focus on connection over metrics

This is not about scale—it's about capacity and care.

Startup Checklist

Starting a County / Regional Peer Support Collaborative

FOUNDATION

☐ Identify at least one peer support lead or coordinator
☐ Clarify the purpose: support, connection, shared capacity
☐ Commit to a realistic meeting cadence (monthly or bi-monthly)

OUTREACH

☐ Personally invite peer support leads from neighboring agencies
☐ Frame participation as optional and supportive
☐ Emphasize support *for peer supporters*

STRUCTURE

☐ Choose meeting length (60–90 minutes)
☐ Decide virtual, in-person, or hybrid
☐ Select a simple, repeatable agenda

VALUES

☐ Agree on confidentiality principles
☐ Respect agency differences
☐ Reinforce that peer support ≠ therapy
☐ Normalize boundaries and stepping back

RESOURCES

☐ Begin a shared list of trusted providers
☐ Share training opportunities
☐ Exchange post-incident tools

SUSTAINABILITY

☐ Rotate facilitation when possible
☐ Keep documentation minimal
☐ Revisit purpose annually

Standing Meeting Agenda Template

County / Regional Peer Support Collaborative Meeting

Meeting Length: 90 minutes
Frequency: Monthly or Bi-Monthly

1. **Welcome & Grounding (10 min)**
    - Quick check-in
    - Reminder of shared values
    - Confidentiality acknowledgment
2. **Focused Topic or Speaker (20–30 min)**:
    - Supporting peers after critical incidents
    - Stress physiology & regulation
    - Boundary setting in peer support
    - Supporting peer supporters
    - Secondary trauma & cumulative stress
3. **Resource Sharing (20 min)**
    - What resources are working
    - What gaps are showing up
    - New providers, tools, or trainings
4. **Open Connection & Discussion (20–30 min)**
    - Peer-to-peer problem solving
    - Questions
    - Shared experiences (no pressure to disclose)
5. **Closing (5 min)**
    - Gratitude
    - Upcoming needs or events
    - Gentle reminder of self-care for helpers

Speaker & Topic Planning Calendar

(12-Month Rotation)

This can have as much flexibility as wanted/needed, based on what the needs of the agencies and region are.

Month 1:
– Purpose of Peer Support Across Agencies

Month 2:
– Stress Physiology & the Nervous System

Month 3:
– Supporting Peers After Critical Incidents

Month 4:
– Boundaries: When to Lean In, When to Refer

Month 5:
– Supporting the Supporters

Month 6:
– Secondary Trauma & Cumulative Exposure

Month 7:
– Peer Support vs Therapy: Staying in Our Lane

Month 8:
– Family Impact & Secondary Stress

Month 9:
– Post-Incident Care Models

Month 10:
– Ethical Challenges in Peer Support

Month 11:
– Wellness Tools That Actually Get Used

Month 12:
– Reflection, Review & Reset for the Year Ahead

Rotate presenters across agencies whenever possible to reduce burden and build shared ownership.

Resource Library Framework

(Living Document Template)

Shared Resource Categories

CLINICAL SUPPORT

- Culturally competent clinicians
- EMDR / brain spotting/ trauma-informed clinicians
- Crisis-response providers

PEER SUPPORT & WELLNESS

- Wellness coaches
- Group facilitators
- Retreats or experiential programs

CRISIS & POST-INCIDENT

- Defusing / debriefing tools
- Family support resources
- Leave-of-absence guidance

TRAINING & EDUCATION

- Peer support training
- Psychological First Aid
- Stress management programs

FUNDING & SUPPORT

- Grants
- County or state resources
- Mutual aid options

Note: Trust matters more than volume. A short, vetted list is more effective than a long one.

Mutual Peer Support Request Guide

(For Large-Scale or High-Impact Events)

Requesting Support from the Regional Network

WHEN TO CONSIDER A REQUEST

- Multiple staff impacted – especially when those include members of the agency peer support team
- Peer supporters are overwhelmed
- Cumulative or prolonged incidents
- High emotional exposure events

HOW TO REQUEST

- Contact designated peer support lead
- Briefly describe needs (presence, check-ins, emotional support dogs, coverage, debriefs, chaplains)
- Clarify timeline and scope
- Identify a point of contact

WHAT SUPPORT MAY LOOK LIKE

- Quiet presence
- Peer check-ins
- Shared processing space
- Temporary coverage support

PROTECTING PEER SUPPORTERS

- Set time limits
- Rotate helpers
- Encourage rest and decompression
- Normalize stepping back
- Built in check ins with peer supporters specifically

Executive Summary for Leadership Buy-In

Why County & Regional Peer Support Collaboratives Matter

County and regional peer support collaboratives strengthen public safety agencies by expanding support capacity, reducing isolation, and protecting peer supporters from burnout. These networks allow agencies to share resources, coordinate during high-impact incidents, and support personnel without overburdening any single team.

Rather than replacing agency peer support programs, collaboratives enhance them—providing trusted relationships, consistent education, and mutual aid when it matters most. The result is healthier personnel, stronger peer support teams, and improved organizational resilience during both routine operations and critical events.