

Framework for Peer Educator Groups



This framework is designed for staff in the health and well-being sector of higher education. This framework is an aid for those looking to create a peer educator program at their institution, as well as a source of inspiration and improvement for pre-existing peer educator programs. Explore the content layout below and gain insight on how to improve the well-being of your college or university.

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What is Peer Education?

Peer education is a system of social support and knowledge dissemination aimed at connecting individuals with similar life experiences. In a college setting, all students are peers because they are going through comparable trials and triumphs. Peer education focuses on harnessing these similarities to promote healthy behaviors through mutual influence. In practice, peer educators go out into the school community and share resources about healthy mental, physical, and emotional behaviors. This may range from topics like fostering healthy relations, practicing safe sex, preventing alcohol and other substance misuse, and managing stress. Through one-on-one interactions, public outreach events, and an active social media presence, peers can have a positive influence on one another. Peer educators are students who commit to promoting these values through their involvement in an organized group. Peer education groups understand the potential impact they can have on the community and do their best to pursue the goal of promoting student health and well-being.

Why Pursue Peer Education?

Peer education is a pivotal part of a comprehensive wellness plan for Missouri colleges and universities. Research has shown that due to similar experiences, peer educators are highly effective in their mission to improve health and wellbeing outcomes¹. Similarities in age range allow peer educators to deeply connect with other students. On the other hand, an authority figure or any older individual, can unintentionally create feelings of shame and stigma in students when discussing wellbeing issues. Talking to a peer allows for a student to share more freely without the fear of repercussions or judgement. This results in increased behavioral change, help seeking, and engagement with wellness programs amongst impacted students.



Peer education is also a gateway to successful social norming techniques. For example, when students hear directly from a peer about safe drinking habits this might convince them to change and inspire them in their own wellbeing journey. Seeing a peer achieve mental, physical, and emotional wellness is a form of positive peer pressure. Usually, peer pressure is seen as a negative, but when it relates to healthy habits and personal growth, it can be very helpful for a community. Representation and relatability matter in situations of social norming and harm reduction. Being able to interact with peer educators that actively prioritize wellbeing in college compels students to look inside and consider their own lifestyle.

Peer groups not only inspire change but support the change along the way. Together with your campus' health and wellbeing staff, substantial work can be done on campus. From outreach events, to one-on-one motivational interviewing, to acting as a liaison between the student body and university administration, peer educators have the capacity for various duties. It is important to explore all of these duties with your group and figure out which goals are attainable for you. Understanding the full potential of your group will allow the growth of a successful peer education program and inspire the next generation of health educators.

Steps to a Successful Peer Education Program

Planning a peer education program

The first step to a peer education program is, of course, planning. If your school has already established a program, feel free to skip to the “recruiting peer educators from the student body” section. There are many questions to ask yourself before embarking on this journey. Some are listed below. Communicate with your supervisor to fully understand if your institution has the finances and resources to support a peer group.

Do you have support and permission from your superiors?

- Contact your direct supervisor to ensure that a peer education program is something you are authorized to create. This can also help you get more support for your program, as your supervisor may be interested in pushing this initiative forward as well.

Is there funding for a peer education group?

- Funding is an important part of any student organization. Does your student health and well-being program have the capacity to take on a new venture? Where would this money be coming from? Outreach events are usually centered around giving away promotional or healthcare items. It is important to account for the items you would want to give out (snacks, stress balls, sexual health products, Narcan, etc.) and the number of students you expect to reach (which of course depends on campus size).

Do you have a space where peers can meet?

- Ideally peers could meet in Student Health/Well-Being office spaces. But if there are not any spaces conducive to team meetings, figure out a meeting space or classroom that can be reserved for student organization meetings.

Determine what activities peers will conduct?

- It is important to determine what activities are feasible for your campus, your students, and your leadership team. Certain groups have the capacity to do everything from peer coaching, motivational interviewing, group presentations, outreach events, and informational tabling. But it may not be practical to attempt everything. Sometimes the quality of activities is more important than quantity. For example, maybe your group will only focus on giving group presentations and doing informational tabling, and that is completely okay!



Selecting staff coordinators

If you do not have the capacity to oversee the peer group, you must recruit someone who is willing to be a staff coordinator. This could be any member of your well-being staff who goes through the designated training and has a passion for student involvement.

- Training will occur through the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Certified Peer Educator (CPE) Train-the-Trainer program. See more about training here.

Recruiting peer educators from the student body

Recruitment is a vital stage of building your peer group. From flyers to tabling to social media posts to email announcements, the most important thing is making your voice heard.

- In the appendix there is a sample flyer for recruitment purposes.

Flyers can be strategically placed in academic buildings that you anticipate more engagement in. This includes digital recruitment flyers playing on campus TV screens.

- For example, flyers might get more attention in buildings that hold psychology, health science, pre-med, nursing, biology, social work, or public health classes. Peer educators are commonly students that have interest in these various topics (of course this is not to say that students of other majors cannot be peer educators). Heavily populated student unions, dining halls, and common areas are also great locations to post flyers.
- If you teach a course or work with faculty that teach, invite them to share the flyer with their students in class.

Tabling is another strategy for recruiting new members. If your school has a student involvement fair at the beginning of the year, use this opportunity to gain interest. Or perhaps you can look into tabling during campus orientation events to grab the interest of first year students. Make sure you have a giveaway of some sort to get people to approach (buttons, candy, stress balls, snacks, etc.). Tabling can continue throughout the year as needed.

During the planning phases, personally contact a couple of students who you have individual relationships with or perhaps who are already involved in student health and wellbeing. Having a core group of students to help with recruitment and get the club on its feet will be absolutely vital.

- These students may also be enticed by the idea of a leadership position in a student organization, which is a great resume builder.

Training peer educators

Similar to the staff coordinator, students must go through NASPA Certified Peer Educator training if they want to become a peer educator.

- The staff coordinator is responsible for setting up this training for students. The Train-the Trainer course will explain the various ways to do this. Once a staff coordinator is NASPA CPE Trainer certified, they can teach the course and personally certify students as peer educators.

The CPE training course takes 12 hours to complete and is broken up into 8 modules. The course can be taught by the staff coordinator during a training session over a long weekend, or throughout a semester as part of a course.

- It is more complex to create a course for students, but the aspect of getting credit hours is an enticing incentive to join, since college students are already busy before any extracurricular commitments.



Set expectations

After recruiting members, it is important to ensure they are dedicated to the cause of the group. This could involve an informal interview process to get to know them and set guidelines before their work with the peers begins.

A brief contract is another way to explicitly state out the time commitment, standards, and expectations of being a peer educator. This way everyone is on the same page of what is expected.

- A sample contract can be found here.

Make sure students know the time commitment they should expect. Not only should they attend meetings, but there should be a requirement of how many outreach events they are expected to attend at a minimum.

Creating a strategic plan for the year

As a staff coordinator, it is your responsibility to plan what your group will achieve for the year. These goals will push students to work hard and stay motivated.

It is important to understand the span of your organization. How many members do you have? How much funding do you have? If either of these areas are lacking, that does not mean that your peer group cannot be successful. When making your strategic plan, be mindful of your personal limitations and make goals that are attainable. For example, a larger peer group might be able to staff ten events per semester, but a smaller group may only be able to staff five. That is okay! Acknowledge this before making your strategic plan.

Working with existing groups is a great idea for expanding the reach of your organization. This also helps get the word out about peer education, which may help with recruitment. These organizations may also ask for your services (ex. presentation requests) in the future if they'd like to learn more about different wellbeing topics.

- Examples of some groups include fraternities, sororities, academic clubs, service organizations, pre-med clubs, etc.

Also ask yourself what peer educators can assist with that is already going on within the realm of student health and wellbeing.

- You don't have to reinvent the wheel when thinking of ways the peers can help. Be a helping hand wherever you can.

Developing content/ implementing programs

This is where the real fun begins. Planning and developing content for your outreach events is a collaborative process between leaders and peer educators. There are a variety of things peers do within the socioecological model of higher education, which can be found here. The most common forms of outreach are presentations, tabling, social media posts, and motivational interviewing.

- As far as presentations are concerned, some common topics are alcohol, stress, sleep, sexual health, tobacco/nicotine, and interpersonal relationships.
- Missouri Partners in Prevention (PIP) has “Programs to Go” on a variety of topics that can be used by your peer education group. Here is a link to these files and accompanying presenter guides: drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sUZBUKrkpr33ebVjv0vsTxoOhDXVwMgA
- PIP also offers the Engage program, which is a multi-level violence prevention program, with support from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Office on Women’s Health in collaboration with the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. The aim of this program is to create a multi-level violence prevention strategy that is both accessible and adaptable. The strategy that we’ve developed frames bystander behavior within the context of community connection and sense of belonging.
 - Engage training includes an online training module for campuses to use as well as overview and deeper dive presentations to be facilitated with students and other audiences.

It is a good skill for peer educators to be able to develop content of their own as well. This content could be in presentation, social media, or tabling form. Here are some questions that will help you to decide what subject you’d like to delve into.

- What single specific behavior do we want to change within that general topic?
- What are 3-4 reasons a student would want to start this health behavior?
- What 3-4 factors prevent students from starting this health behavior?
- What information do we want the student to leave with? *Facts, strategies, campus resources, etc.
- If tabling: Elevator Speech (<10 second spiel on the focus and purpose of the table) *If it needs > 10 secs, we are doing too much!

Partners in Prevention can also be a helpful resource when tabling. PIP stores a number of giveaway items related to mental health, tobacco, prescription drug misuse, and alcohol. Contact PIP at pip@missouri.edu to see what we have in stock.

Linking to services

A peer education group is not simply there to plug their own services. They are there to promote all available wellness resources.

- **School-wide:** counseling center (can help with mental health issues that are outside the scope of a peer educator’s expertise), student health center (can help physically), disability center (can help with learning issues, physical accommodations, etc.), career services (can help students who are stressed about their future)

- **State-wide:** Partners in Prevention
- **Nation-wide:** Crisis hotlines (988 (suicide & crisis hotline), The Trevor Project (LGBTQ mental health), BlackLine (systematic oppression))

Supporting and keeping peer educators motivated

It is also important to keep the group fun to motivate and uplift the peer educators. This increases group morale and inspires them to keep up their good work.

- End of the semester parties (i.e., bowling, pizza, game night)

Leadership opportunities also keep peer educators motivated. College is a time for building your resume to achieve your future career goals. So, leadership opportunities are a hot commodity. Ensure that there are opportunities for leadership and growth within the group.

Letters of recommendation are also helpful incentives for students. If you work closely with students, you will likely be able to comment on their work ethic/accomplishments very well.

Monitoring and evaluation of programs

It is important to ensure that your group does not get stagnant. The best way to do this is through evaluations.

- Evaluate the peers periodically throughout the semester, especially after outreach events. This could be as simple as a check in during meetings (“What were our successes?”, “What were our setbacks?”, “How was engagement?”)
- Ask the students you interact with to evaluate the peer group. What do they think? What could be improved upon? What did they enjoy?
 - A sample evaluation can be found in the appendix.

Working with other peer groups throughout the state will help your group to thrive. There is no such thing as “stealing ideas”! Ideas are meant to be shared. Then you can take your own spin on what another group did that is catered to your specific campus.

- PIP has a Basecamp where peer education groups across the state can put ideas of engagement activities they have done throughout the year. Please use this board to give and receive inspiration. Email PIP at pip@missouri.edu to be added to the group.

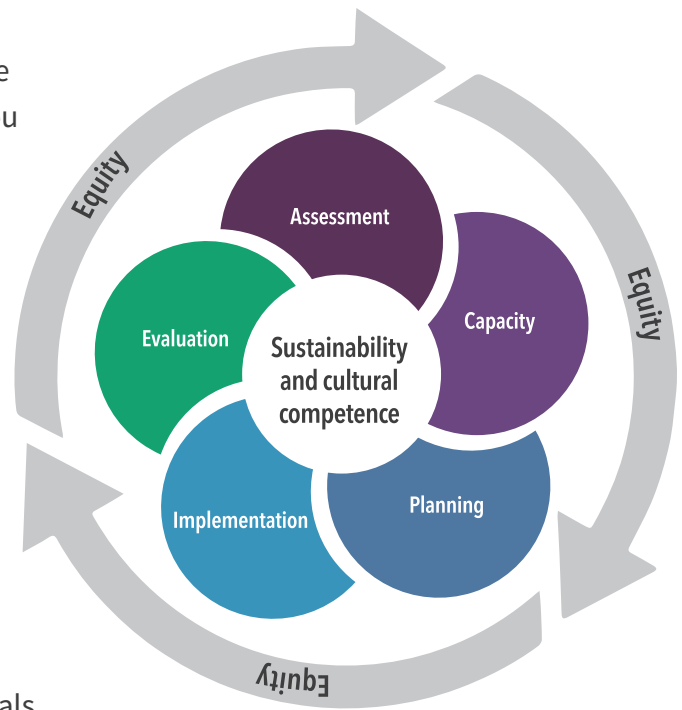
Applying the Strategic Prevention Framework to Individual Peer Education Events

Assessment

Annually, Partners in Prevention sends out the Missouri Annual College Health Behavior (MACHB) survey. Using your campus-specific MACHB data, your leadership team can decide what your campus’ top wellness priorities are. This will shift the focus to what your peer team wants to focus on for each particular event.

Capacity

Figure out how you will address these needs. This is where resources meet readiness. How many peer educators do you want to recruit? What funding do you plan to set aside for this peer education group? Also understand that there are limits to peer educator groups. Does your group have the capacity to expand to more involved activities like one-on-one peer coaching or not? Respect the limitations of students and their schedules. Also understand that some topics may be triggering for students and individual peer educators may not want to discuss certain things (i.e. interpersonal violence, sexual health topics, suicide, etc.)



Planning

How will you complete outreach events? Plan the materials that you need, location, and any permissions to do this.

Implementation

Putting your plan into action. Make sure there is a positive attitude amongst peers who are going out into the community.

Evaluation

After each event, regroup with your peers. Ask them what they think went well and not so well. Brainstorm ideas about how to avoid any problems that appeared for the next time. Celebrate your wins! Encouragement and support will create a feeling of fulfillment and push the group to continue their efforts.

At the center of everything the peer group does:

- **Cultural competence:** Cultural competence is the ability of an individual or organization to understand, interact, and engage with people who have different values, culture, languages, lifestyles, and traditions based on their distinctive heritage and social relationships. Understand the culture of your specific university and your specific peer group. Don't simply cater to the majority groups on campus. This may be tempting because catering only to the majority may potentially mean more engagement. But it is important to cater to all groups on campus. It is okay and encouraged to adapt/tailor presentations and events to meet the various needs of individual groups. For example, if you are meeting with a fraternity you may focus on alcohol safety.
- **Sustainability:** The process of building an adaptive and effective system that achieves and maintains desired long-term results. Understand how to keep your peer group continually motivated. Put in effort to make your peer group a solid organization on campus. This dedication strengthens the influence you have on the campus community. The more established a group is, the more people know about it, and hence the more engagement you have with the student body (i.e. more students want to become members of your peer group or more students will request your services).

How Peer Educators Can Assist on the Levels of the Socioecological Model

The Socioecological Model (SEM) is a framework that displays how individuals interact with and impact their society at various levels. The SEM is used here to show the peers' impact at each level of the university. This is a concrete list of events, interventions, and resources that peer educators provide to the student body.

Individual

Set a good example through your own actions.

- The first step towards influencing your university is being a good role model. Peer pressure can be a useful tool when promoting healthy habits. So, when you value your well-being, others will follow.

Relationship (Interpersonal):

Meet with students one-on-one.

- Motivational interviewing is a technique that is adjacent to counseling and can be used to push individuals towards change on their own volition. Training your peers on motivational interviewing techniques can increase their efficacy when talking with their peers. MI training will equip your peers to know what to say when they are approached by students who want to make a change.
- Another idea is starting a chat line or anonymous question box that students can reach out to when they need some peer-to-peer advice. The peers could have a webpage or social media page where they post answers to the anonymous questions.

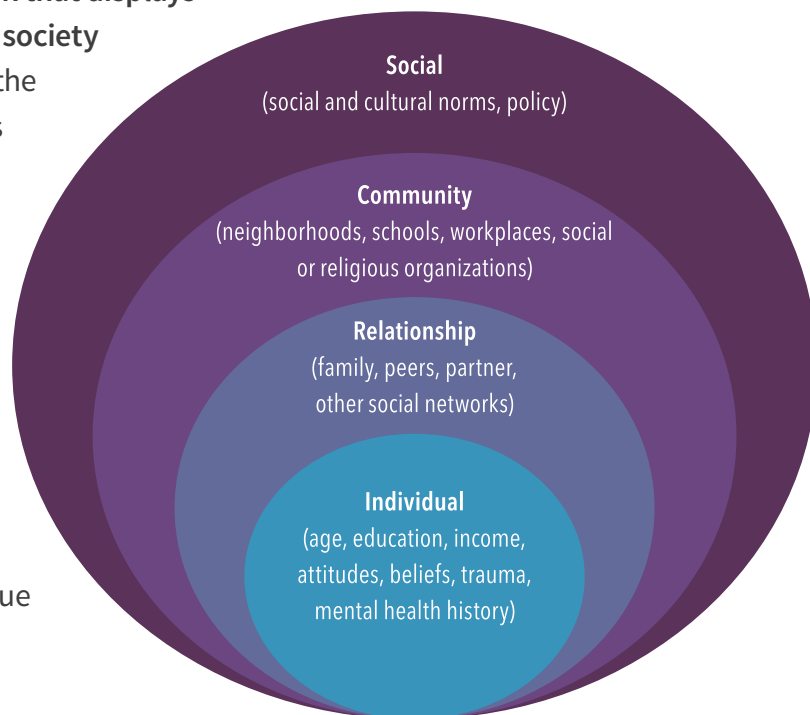
Community

Collaboration with all parts of the campus community helps to increase the scope of your peer group.

- Specifically, working with your counseling center can be of great benefit. The counseling center could refer students to the peers. Sometimes it can make someone feel better to simply commiserate. This collaboration could increase student-to-student interaction which can greatly benefit well-being.

To engage with the community as a whole, this is where the classic outreach events come in. Ideas include:

- Finals events (helping to reduce stress, giving students a break, cheering them up with a treat)
- Handing out sexual health products



- Handing out Narcan
- Handing out tobacco cessation products
- Guided meditations
- Giving presentations to campus organizations about a variety of topics (stress, sleep, alcohol, sexual health, interpersonal relationships, homesickness etc.)

Societal

This level involves strategies that can make an impact on the campus as a whole. Think past your preconceived idea of what the peers can do and dream big.

- Peers can be advocates for policy change at a high level.
- Peers could be a good liaison between the student body and school administration. Having someone to speak for the students from a well-being perspective can create powerful changes. These waves can reach far and wide.

How can we support each other?

As a member of Partners in Prevention, your campus has access to many valuable resources. The pinnacle of these resources is each other! Communication, sharing of ideas, and offering encouragement to other peer groups will help everyone to be stronger and make a greater impact on their individual college campuses. So, please look into joining the Basecamp, referenced above. This page is specifically made for peer education groups and there is a message board and chat function that can be utilized for collaboration. Please use this site to post any questions, concerns, or celebrations. Sharing what worked well for your group will give great inspiration to other groups and vice versa. Everyone benefits from the exchange of ideas!

Information on Training

Peer educator training and staff coordinator training are completed through National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Certified Peer Educator (CPE) courses. There is a Train-the-Trainer Course for campus staff members that oversee the peer education group. Taking this course enables staff advisors to facilitate the CPE curriculum to students who want to join the organization. CPE Trainers gain access to all CPE materials and earn their CPE Trainer Certification. Once the staff coordinator has completed this training, they are certified to teach the CPE course. They will have all the necessary materials and expertise to train students to be a NASPA CPE. An overview of the learning modules for the student CPE course is linked here: naspa.org/files/dmfile/Certified-Peer-Education-CPE-Module-Outline.pdf

Use this link to find more information on enrolling for the CPE Training and the Train-the-Trainer Course: naspa.org/course/certified-peer-educator-cpe-train-the-trainer-course

Definitions

Social Norming

Social norms are the perceived informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behavior. They consist of what we do, what we believe others do, and what we believe others approve of and expect us to do. Social norms are therefore situated at the interplay between behavior, beliefs and expectations. ([unicef.org/media/111061/file/Social-norms-definitions-2021.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/111061/file/Social-norms-definitions-2021.pdf))

Strategic Plan

Strategic planning in health care involves a comprehensive analysis of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis is used to identify areas of improvement and develop strategies to help the organization achieve its goals. (uagc.edu/blog/what-strategic-planning-health-care#:~:text=Strategic%20planning%20in%20health%20care%20involves%20a%20comprehensive%20analysis%20of,the%20organization%20achieve%20its%20goals)

Strategic Prevention Framework

Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) is the five steps and two guiding principles that offer prevention practitioners a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing health problems facing their communities. It helps to develop and sustain programs and practices that reduce behavioral health inequities. ([samhsa.gov/sptac/strategic-prevention-framework](https://www.samhsa.gov/sptac/strategic-prevention-framework))

Sources

Pointon-Haas J, Waqar L, Upsher R, Foster J, Byrom N, Oates J. A systematic review of peer support interventions for student mental health and well-being in higher education. *BJPsych Open*. 2024;10(1):e12. doi:10.1192/bjo.2023.603

<https://www.ippf.org/resource/included-involved-inspired-framework-youth-peer-education-programmes>

Appendix

Recruitment Flyer

BECOME A PEER EDUCATOR

BE AN ALLY, ADVOCATE, LISTENER,
AND HELPER TO YOUR FELLOW
STUDENTS



For more info, contact:

Expectations List

Weekly Meetings

Include the time of your meetings, number of excused absences allowed, and attitudes expected during meetings.

Presentations and Outreach Events

- Students need to be CPE before they can give presentations
- Do students need to do any practice before giving a formal presentation? Any shadowing?
- How many outreach events are you expecting students to work each semester?
 - This number may vary depending on how many total events you plan to have.

Sample Contract

There are certain expectations peer educators are expected to meet. To hold our group accountable and ensure that we are doing the best work for the campus community, please review/sign this contract. Initial next to each statement to show your agreement and sign at the bottom. Thank you for your continued dedication to the health and well-being of our school.

_____ Peer educators will work to ensure the health and well-being of all students on campus, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, etc.

_____ Peer educators will attend weekly meetings (with the exception of two absences) and communicate all absences with the peer coordinator

_____ Peer educators will behave in a responsible and professional manner, since they are representative of the values of the group.

_____ Peer educators will attend ___ outreach events each semester.

_____ Peer educators will complete the required trainings to become certified.

Peer educator: (print) _____

Peer educator: (sign) _____

Date: _____

Sample Evaluation Questions

Peer Education Presentation Evaluation

Help us improve with your feedback on what you heard and saw today.

What is today's date?

Month, day, year



This program provided information that will help me improve my well-being or help me improve the well-being of others.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How likely are you to apply what you learned in this program to your life?

- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

The presenter(s) was knowledgeable about the topic.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

The presenter(s) were engaging and maintained my interest.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

What is the most helpful piece of information you learned today?

Short answer text

How can we improve this program?

Short answer text

