

5. RECRUITING, HIRING, AND ORIENTING PEERS

READ MORE: ORIENTING NON-PEER STAFF

Orienting Non-Peer Employees on Peer Support, Philosophy and Program Models

It is critical to the success and sustainability of peer programs that all employees within organizations understand the unique roles, philosophy and goals of peer programs. This understanding will also provide a workplace culture that is more likely to value peer work and leadership within the organization. Inclusion of peer work, whether it is paid or volunteer, in new employee orientation demonstrates that the organization values peer work. It also helps to set the stage for new employees to view peers as their colleagues and co-workers.

The actual orientation may include the following topic areas:

1. The philosophy of peer support and services: what peers bring to the service system that is unique and how it can impact program outcomes
2. Having a peer speak to new employees as part of orientation is a key component. Discussing their role as a peer, the impact that they see with clients and how they came into the work
3. A training component on cultural competency considerations in working alongside employees who are HIV-positive and may bring very different life experiences to the work
4. Some brief reading on peer models of service delivery, challenges and successes

Providing non-peer staff orientation can result in the following outcomes:

1. Peer employees, who may not have the depth of professional experience that other employees bring, will enter into a work culture that is welcoming and values their skills.
2. Non-peer employees will be in a better position to know when to access peer support and services. They will be able to maximize overall support for clients they may be working with.
3. Non-peer employees will know how to discuss peer service with the broader community of service providers and clinicians.
4. Diversity within the organization will be enhanced. More often than not, the inclusion of peers within the employee pool enhances diversity in terms of life experience, HIV status, race and class. This creates a stronger team in supporting people living with HIV.

Because formalized peer models of support are still fairly new to most clinics and organizations serving people with HIV, it is important that a focused orientation for non-peer employees is in place. This will help avoid a situation where the peers are isolated and underutilized within organizations.

This “Read More” section accompanies [Section 5: Recruiting, Hiring, and Orienting Peers](#), part of the online toolkit *Building Blocks to Peer Program Success*. For more information, visit http://peer.hdwg.org/program_dev