



Hire Youth!

Best Practices for Peer Navigators



POINT SOURCE YOUTH



**Liberty
Mutual.**
INSURANCE

Welcome to the world of peer navigation. In this manual, you will learn the foundations, practices, and strategies needed to establish and sustain a peer navigation program in your community.

At the heart of this work lies the belief that hiring youth with lived experience can fundamentally shape the services we provide, for the better. We recognize the immense value that comes from lived experience, and by offering Peer Navigators a livable wage, we can uplift them to become catalysts for change.

We recognize that many providers have a lot of questions about how best to hire and support Peer Navigators. In this manual we'll be answering your nitty gritty questions so you feel confident knowing the exact steps you'll need to take to get started.

The information in this Handbook will be useful for all staff involved in launching and sustaining a Peer Navigation program. Whether you are the CEO, a Program Director, or a Peer Navigator, we hope you will walk away with valuable information to help you do your part in making your peer navigation program a success.

Employing young people as Peer Navigators is essential if you want to truly support young people experiencing homelessness and/or living with HIV. Effective solutions cannot be created or maintained without elevating, listening to, and centering the voices of youth with lived experience.

Point Source Youth (PSY) created this handbook with the help of our National Youth Advocates, funded by ViiV Healthcare's Positive Action for Youth (PAFY) Grant. This initiative is overseen by PSY's Director of Youth Leadership & Advocacy, [Andrew Gutierrez III](#), and Program Manager of Youth Leadership, [DaJonee Hale](#). Together, Andrew and DaJonee facilitate a monthly Peer Learning Community for the National Youth Advocates to connect, exchange knowledge and build supportive resources to be shared across communities.

In addition to working with young people with lived experience, we also consulted other experts in the field. We thank [Adriana Rodriguez-Baptiste](#) and [Kelly McKenna](#), the co-authors of this handbook, for bringing this project to life.

We are grateful for the authentic youth collaboration and intergenerational partnerships that have informed this handbook. We hope that you take this handbook back to your organization and community and use it to kickstart your own peer navigation programs.

— The Point Source Youth Team

This handbook is part of a broader resource guide on affirming, uplifting and supporting young people as Paid Peer Navigators, Youth Mentors, and HIV Peer Navigators. We recommend reviewing the tools and resources in this handbook with our [National Youth Mentorship & Empowerment Initiative handbook](#) to best co-develop, improve, and/or expand your youth engagement work.

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THE NATIONAL YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND MENTORSHIP INITIATIVE LEADERS OF 2022



XANDER BRIERE



ABBY FERRER



CHARMET FINDLEY JR.



**ZEMAYE (SLAY-Z)
JACOBS**



ANDREA OLVERA



MASON PERSONS



BRIDGET RAYMUNDO



KEONA ROSE



JACQ TATE



MÓNICA GARCÍA VEGA



SINCERE WILLIAMS



SAMANTHA WU



FOUNDATIONS FOR STARTING A PEER NAVIGATION PROGRAM DOS AND DON'TS

When starting any new program, it can feel overwhelming. Starting a Peer Navigation program may feel very different from other programs you or your agency have launched before. In this section we will lay the foundations for starting a Peer Navigation program.

Dos

- Offer a living wage
- Provide supervision and check-ins regularly
- Respect lived experience
- Assess your org.'s competence in this area
- Seek out support and expertise when needed
- Provide trauma informed supervision
- Be mindful of burnout and vicarious trauma.
- Offer to delegate tasks
- Provide space to take a break from the work
- Offer a safe place for supervision
- Encourage teamwork
- Welcome Peer Navigators to the team and the org.
- Review the policies and procedures handbook of org.
- Remember the impact and expertise of lived experience
- Communicate work responsibilities thoroughly
- Listen to concerns
- Mirror and offer problem solving techniques
- Acknowledge mistakes you have made as a supervisor
- Provide accommodations if requested
- Inform the peer navigator how to make requests for accommodations
- Provide opportunities for growth and development
- Give the peer navigator options when assigned a work project that may be triggering
- Affirm and praise the Peer Navigator's work
- Have professional development be part of your work with youth.
Create on-ramps for youth to gain experience and knowledge in the field.

Don'ts

- Impose your idea of professionalism on youth
- Create unnecessary obstacles for youth
- Assume the peer navigator should tell you their entire story
- Be unreliable, if supervision or a check-in is scheduled, follow through
- Minimize the peer navigator's experience because your youth was different
- Compare your struggles to the peer navigator
- Forget that the peer navigator is the expert in their life
- Conclude that because a peer navigator relates to the client they are working with that they are being unprofessional.
- Assume your style of communication is the only way to be with clients being served
- Share the peer navigator's story without their consent.
- Provide projects or workloads without support and guidance
- Tokenize Peer Navigators. They are much more than their lived experience.

Hiring Youth Impacts Services

Hiring Peer Navigators can have a significant impact on the services that nonprofits offer. Hiring youth directly improves engagement between your agency and program participants, helping to improve program outcomes. It also leads to increased diversity, representation, and community impact.

Let's take a closer look into the impact that hiring youth can have!

Enhanced Youth Engagement

Peer Navigators can help to build stronger relationships with the youth that the nonprofit serves, which can lead to increased engagement and participation in the organization's programs and activities. By having navigators who are closer in age to the youth, they can also serve as relatable role models and provide guidance and support that is more easily received.

Improved Program Outcomes

With the help of Peer Navigators, nonprofits can create more tailored programs that are better suited to the needs and interests of the youth. Peer Navigators can provide valuable input on the design and implementation of programs, which can lead to improved outcomes for the youth participants.¹

Increased Diversity and Representation

Hiring Peer Navigators from diverse backgrounds can help to ensure that the nonprofit's programs are inclusive and representative of the communities they serve. This can lead to better outcomes for all participants and help to build a more equitable and just society.²

Greater Community Impact

By hiring Peer Navigators, nonprofits can help to create a pipeline of young leaders who are invested in their communities and can serve as positive role models for their peers. This can help to strengthen the organization's impact and reach and can create a positive ripple effect throughout the community.³

Hiring Peer Navigators can be a valuable investment for nonprofits, as it can lead to improved outcomes for the youth they serve, a stronger sense of community, and greater impact overall.

Offering a Livable Wage

Nonprofits who serve youth experiencing homelessness and/or diagnosed with HIV should *always* be focused on the broader mission to end youth homelessness and eradicate poverty.

Part of this work is putting our money where our mouth is. It is each of our responsibility to pay young people a livable wage. Here's why:

Value and Recognition

Peer Navigators bring a unique set of skills and experiences to their work, and their contributions are often informed by their personal experiences of overcoming challenges and barriers. Offering a livable wage demonstrates that their work is valued and recognized as a valuable and important contribution to the organization and to the individuals and communities they serve.⁴

Professionalism

Offering a livable wage to Peer Navigators can also help to professionalize their role within the organization. It recognizes that Peer Navigators have a specific set of skills and knowledge that are essential to the organization's work. Peer Navigators are professionals in their own right, and they should be treated and compensated as such.⁵

Now that you know why offering a livable wage is important, let's dive into the logistics!

Payment Turn-Around

Because Peer Navigators are performing essential work needed to fulfill the mission of the agency, timely payments are important. Peer Navigators are not volunteering their time. They are using their expertise and the resources they have encountered during their journey of lived experience to complete the task at hand. Therefore, they should be informed when payment will be received and provided payment on a timely basis, as you would pay any other employee or contractor.

Determining Payment Rates

Peer Navigators can be treated as independent contractors or salaried employees. We encourage you to look at the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#) to determine a livable wage. You can also check average salaries on sites like [Glassdoor](#) or [ZipRecruiter](#).

Sustainability

Offering a livable wage can help to ensure the sustainability of the organization's peer navigation program. By paying Peer Navigators a wage that allows them to support themselves and their families, the organization can attract and retain qualified and committed Peer Navigators, who can provide continuity and stability to the program.⁶

Equity

Offering a livable wage to Peer Navigators can also help to promote equity and social justice. Many Peer Navigators come from marginalized communities and may face economic and social barriers to employment. Offering a livable wage can help to address these inequities and ensure that peer navigation programs are accessible and inclusive to all.⁷

Exploring Different Payment Cycles

If your organization is still experimenting with adding Peer Navigators to its list of salaried employees, you can start by hiring Peer Navigators as independent contractors. We strongly encourage you to follow a payment cycle, as Peer Navigators will be using their wages to support themselves. Payments should be made on a consistent basis (e.g. every 2 weeks, or the 1st and 15th of month).

Considering Different Payment Forms

Some young people may prefer to use Venmo or PayPal over traditional banks because these platforms are easier to set up and use. Your Human Resources Department should work with the people you employ to find a payment method that works for both parties. If youth need education or assistance in setting up a bank account, you should have referrals and resources you can offer. Additionally, we recommend giving people the option to accept a paper check if they'd prefer not to open a bank account.

“Ok, how much should I pay a Peer Navigator?”

You should pay all of your staff, including Peer Navigators, a living wage. Advocates define the living wage as the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs. Basic needs include housing, food, healthcare, and other essential needs. More specifically, a living wage permits a person to spend no more than 30% of their income on housing.

If you're unsure of what a living wage would be in your community, check out the [Living Wage Calculator developed by MIT](#). The calculator estimates the cost of living in your community or region based on typical expenses. This tool helps individuals, communities, and employers determine a local wage rate that allows residents to meet minimum standards of living.

Don't Pay Peer Navigators in Gift Cards

How would you like to be paid in gift cards?

It probably wouldn't feel so good.

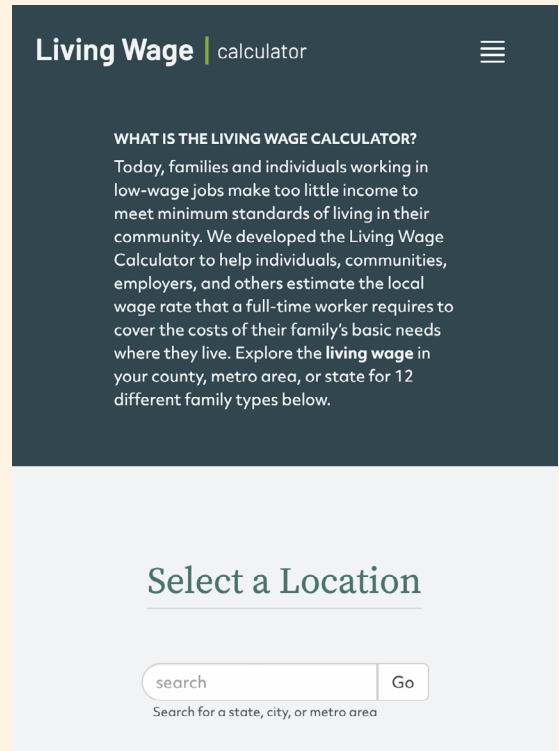
When you pay someone in gift cards, it sends the message that you do not value their work. It appears that you are paying them as a “thank you” rather than recognizing that they are a real professional, providing your organization and program participants a valuable service.

Gift cards may also be an attempt to control or influence how Peer Navigators spend their money.

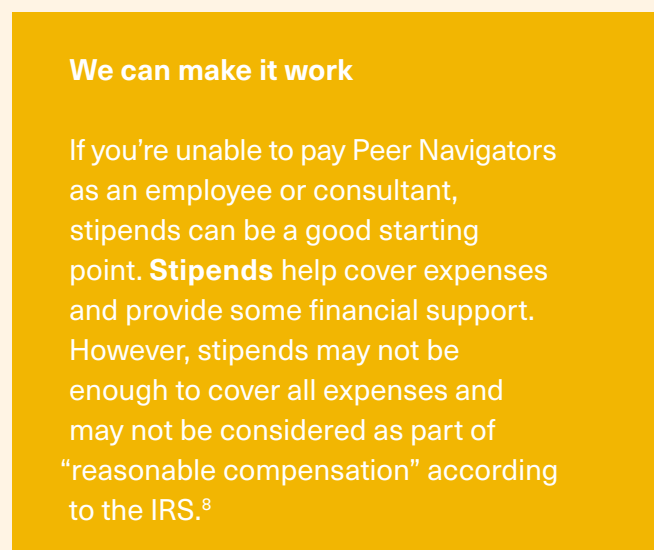
Lastly, the IRS isn't on board with paying people in gift cards. Gift cards may not be considered fair compensation for Peer Navigators working in the nonprofit industry because they may not be considered what the IRS considers “reasonable compensation”.

If gift cards are being used as compensation, the nonprofit 501(C) agency/employer must remember the IRS considers the following in determining whether compensation is reasonable: base compensation, incentive compensation, and any other economic benefits conferred by the organization onto the employee.⁹

Therefore, it is best practice to pay Peer Navigators a living wage that is reflective of their experience and expertise.



The screenshot shows the 'Living Wage calculator' website. The header includes the title 'Living Wage | calculator' and a menu icon. Below the header, there is a section titled 'WHAT IS THE LIVING WAGE CALCULATOR?' with a paragraph explaining the tool's purpose: 'Today, families and individuals working in low-wage jobs make too little income to meet minimum standards of living in their community. We developed the Living Wage Calculator to help individuals, communities, employers, and others estimate the local wage rate that a full-time worker requires to cover the costs of their family's basic needs where they live. Explore the living wage in your county, metro area, or state for 12 different family types below.' Below this text is a large heading 'Select a Location' and a search input field with a 'Go' button. The search field contains the text 'search' and a placeholder 'Search for a state, city, or metro area'.



We can make it work

If you're unable to pay Peer Navigators as an employee or consultant, stipends can be a good starting point. **Stipends** help cover expenses and provide some financial support. However, stipends may not be enough to cover all expenses and may not be considered as part of “reasonable compensation” according to the IRS.⁸

Respecting Lived Experience

Young people with lived experience often face significant barriers to employment, including lack of access to education and training, discrimination, and limited opportunities in their communities. As a result, they may have limited work experience, and they may also be navigating ongoing challenges related to their own personal experiences.

It is important for organizations that hire Peer Navigators to understand their limitations, and to be open to learning about the peer navigator's expertise. This will help to ensure that clients receive the appropriate level of care, while also recognizing the unique contributions that Peer Navigators can make to the organization.

Peer Navigators have firsthand experience of navigating the healthcare or social service system, and they may have insights and perspectives that traditional providers do not. By being open to learning from Peer Navigators, organizations can improve their services and better meet the needs of their clients.

When considering young people with lived experience as potential Peer Navigators, it is important for employers to ensure that they're able to provide adequate support, training, and resources to help them be successful in their role.

This may include practical support like funding for uniforms or required certifications, as well as specialized training on topics such as [trauma-informed care and cultural humility](#), as well as ongoing supervision and support to help Peer Navigators navigate the challenges of their work.

Employers must also be aware of the potential impact of vicarious trauma on Peer Navigators and take steps to ensure that they have access to the necessary resources to maintain their own emotional and mental well-being.

Other employees should treat Peer Navigators as colleagues, not children or clients. Older adults should not attempt to "parent" Peer Navigators. If appropriate, other employees may act as a professional mentor.

“Organizations should give their staff with lived experience an **equal seat at the table**. Organizations should not just turn to Peer Navigators for simple questions, like what color paint to use in housing. Organizations should seek out the opinions of Peer Navigators with big decisions, like budgets and policies, as well.”

— 2022 National Youth Advocate Cohort Member,
from 2023 Focus Group & Listening Session

“We should stop judging folks for not having a degree especially when it comes to social justice related work, because often times we have **decades worth of lived experience** that we can pull from, but because we were struggling or experiencing homelessness, or just really being affected by the system at the time, we never had the opportunity to obtain a formal degree.”

— **XANDER BRIERE**

Organizational Self Awareness

It is important for organizations that hire Peer Navigators to understand the organization's own limitations. We need to stop tokenizing Peer Navigators and start recognizing their contributions and providing them with opportunities for growth and development. This can include providing training and support, as well as opportunities for advancement within the organization. It's also important to ensure that Peer Navigators are compensated fairly for their work and that they have access to resources and support when needed.

To avoid adultism, when hiring youth Peer Navigators, understand that Peer Navigators have valuable skills and firsthand experiences that can contribute to the organization's mission and growth. Nonprofits should also provide opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making processes and provide them with support and resources when needed.

In summary, putting these practices in place can help the nonprofit demonstrate that they are truly interested in the Peer Navigators' opinions on the approach to the mission vs. just checking a box to say, "we hire Peer Navigators".

Cultural Competency Training

Cultural competency training helps people and organizations to understand and effectively work with others from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those who may have different beliefs, values, and experiences. It is important for organizations that hire Peer Navigators to be trained in cultural competency. In particular, organizations should make sure that they are culturally responsive to youth of color and queer and trans youth

Organizations should also support Peer Navigators' professional development by investing in cultural competency training for them as well. Peer Navigators often work with individuals who come from diverse backgrounds and who may have different cultural beliefs and practices.

Some of the key components of cultural competency training for organizations that hire Peer Navigators may include:

- Understanding the importance of cultural diversity and how it **impacts healthcare and social service delivery**.
- Developing awareness of one's own cultural **biases and assumptions** and learning how to avoid stereotyping or making assumptions about individuals from different cultural backgrounds.
- Learning about different cultural **beliefs, practices, and customs**, and how these may impact healthcare and social service delivery.
- Developing **communication skills** that are sensitive to different cultural backgrounds, such as the use of language and nonverbal cues.

Organizations should also be culturally responsive and better prepared to welcome Peer Navigators onto their team.

Cultural responsiveness is an approach that empowers people intellectually, socially, and emotionally, by using cultural representation to provide knowledge, skills, and attitudes.¹⁰ It involves valuing racial/ethnic cultures, views, and experiences and incorporating them into teaching and learning; strengthening and enriching the school system and the community at large with the presence and contributions of many cultures.

To determine an organizations' level of cultural responsiveness, a team assessment is a great place to start. Check out [Mass Mentoring's Culturally Responsive Assessment](#) (on page 13) to start the conversation and begin reflecting on personal power and privilege.¹¹

“It is important (for programs and navigators) to acknowledge the impact of systemic oppression, marginalization, and inequality. Co-learning and open discussion within the mentor/mentee relationship is shown to increase relationship closeness and youth outcomes.”¹²

A Note on Professionalism¹³

Peer navigation and lived experience are ushering in a new wave of professionalism, especially in fields where personal connection and understanding are important, such as mental health, social work, and community development.

Traditionally, professionalism has been associated with a certain level of formal education and experience, as well as adherence to established protocols and procedures. However, peer navigation and lived experience bring a new perspective to professionalism by recognizing the value of **personal experience, empathy, and relationship-building**.

Peer navigation acknowledges the unique insights and understanding that individuals with lived experience can offer and emphasizes the importance of peer support and connection in achieving positive outcomes.

By incorporating peer mentorship and lived experience into professional frameworks, we can create a more holistic and compassionate approach to serving individuals and communities. This new wave of professionalism recognizes that personal experience and connection can be just as valuable as formal education and training, and that they can work together to achieve the best outcomes for those in need.

Peer mentorship and lived experience are helping to transform the way we approach professionalism in fields where personal connection and understanding are essential, and are bringing new perspectives and insights to the table that can benefit both professionals and the people they serve.

Another obstacle that can decrease the ability to hire and retain Peer Navigators includes the **policies and procedures manual that govern the workplace**. These rules may challenge the ability of a peer navigator to authentically show up as they are. Examples of some policies include policing appearances such as hair color or styles that are not developed with Queer BIPOC young adults in mind. If an organization truly wants to include Peer Navigators on their team and not just “check a box”, we encourage you to **review your dress code** rules and determine whether these policies are stopping the peer navigator from connecting with the young people they will serve or the work they are assigned to carry out.

In addition, other requirements such as having a **driver's license** vs. having a state ID may create a challenge for a young person applying for a peer navigator position; this is especially true if the young person is able to fulfill the job responsibilities by taking public transportation or an Uber.

Lastly, the most important challenge that a young person may face includes not asking for medical accommodation. Please [reference the section](#) of this handbook on ADA requirements as ordered by the Department of Labor for more information.



BEST HIRING PRACTICES FOR AGENCIES

We already covered the importance of hiring youth and valuing their expertise, with adequate financial compensation and a meaningful seat at the table. We also challenged you to rethink how you define professionalism in order to be more culturally competent and youth-friendly.

Now, in this section let's take a deeper dive into some best practices for agencies during the hiring process.

Hiring

It is important to **clearly define the role** and responsibilities of the Peer Navigator, including the expectations and qualifications for the position.

Recruitment is just as important and incumbent on the human resource department and hiring managers to reach out to a diverse pool of candidates and utilize multiple recruitment channels, such as online job postings, social media, and community outreach.

The **selection** process must be fair, transparent, and inclusive.

Our National Youth Advocates suggested **including young people when hiring** staff.

- Ex: Including Peer Navigators and other Youth Leaders in the interview process for other program staff.
- Ex: including other Peer Navigators, Youth Leaders, Youth Navigators, and/or program participants when hiring Peer Navigators

By including young people in the interview process, you are making sure that the people you hire can appropriately relate to and interact with the young people being served by your programs.

Onboarding

Onboarding includes offering training and development in addition to comprehensive ongoing support to help Peer Navigators develop the necessary skills to effectively support their mentees.

We asked Point Source Youth's 2022 National Youth Advocates to share their recommendations for onboarding a peer navigator. Review the checklist below to see the important steps our Advocates recommended and incorporate them in your existing onboarding processes.

- **Welcome** the Peer Navigator to the team.
- Respect everyone's chosen **name and pronouns**.
- Create a safe space for supervision where the peer navigator can **understand** the responsibilities of their job and ask clarifying questions about their assignments without fear of repercussion (i.e., there are no wrong questions).
- Offer **support** if the supervisor can help.
- Provide an **immersive onboarding** training where the peer navigator can understand the organization's mission statement, code of ethics, dress code, access to human resources, receive an explanation of benefits and inform them about the organization's employee assistance program (EAP).
- Match up the peer navigator with a **colleague** within the organization that they can go to and ask for guidance.
- Review the **grievance policy**.
- **Schedule and maintain supervision** with Peer Navigators and explain what to expect in these meetings.
- Establish a **transparent policy** that outlines how performance improvement plans and employee evaluations are used to determine merit increase and promotions.
- Review of the **tax forms** they are asked to complete when they are hired.
- Offer a **tutorial** of how to complete regularly used forms (e.g., how to complete an invoice, how to request days off, etc.)
- Review the **code of ethics** in depth and identify how adhering to these regulations may impact performance and employability.

Confidentiality

The National Youth Advocates shared the challenges and feelings they faced when working as a peer navigator. We believe it is important to highlight some of these challenges in order to better help organizations understand the importance of being clear regarding hiring practices and program participation.

There is no "right" answer to some of these challenges. The youth we talked to had different opinions on how best to navigate them. We want to share their different perspectives, so you can consider them when making the best decision for your organization.

Youth felt slighted that they were unable to apply for paid Peer Navigator positions within the organization while also being served as a participant. Organizations had policies in place to respect confidentiality. These policies varied from not allowing clients to apply for full-time positions, waiting two years after finishing a program to be eligible to work there, or requiring staff to have aged out of a program and be 25 years or older. While these policies are well intentioned, they also **force some youth to make the difficult decision of choosing between housing resources or a job**.

On the other hand, some youth felt this was a good policy and appreciated the confidentiality this offered them from their peers within the program.

Titles

We asked the 2022 National Youth Advocates what titles they'd suggest when hiring a young person based on their lived experience in order to boost their resume. Here's the list they came up with. Use it for inspiration and feel free to get creative!

Board Member	Peer Support Specialist	Youth Engagement Specialist
Case Manager Aid	Program Coordinator	Youth Event Producer
Community Activist	Project Specialist	Youth Expert for Authentic Connections
Community Organizer	Research Assistant	Youth Homelessness Consultant
Consultant	Research Coordinator	Youth Leader
Engagement Expert	System Expert	Youth Manager
Outreach & Events Coordinator	Technical Assistance	Youth Navigator
Outreach Coordinator	Youth Activist	Youth Organizer
Peer Counselor	Youth Advocate	Youth Programs Liaison
Peer Navigator	Youth Consultant	Youth Representative for Authentic Connections
Peer Specialist	Youth Coordinator	

Asking Staff to Share Their Story

There is so much value in Peer Navigators sharing their own stories and experiences. Organizations may ask Peer Navigators to share their stories in order to:

- Educate staff or community members
- Fundraise
- Connect with program participants
- Provide perspective from lived experience and improve organizational decision making

It can be emotionally draining, triggering, and even retraumatizing for Peer Navigators to retell their stories.

Employers can (and should) help their employees understand the impact of telling their story by:

- **Providing education and information:** Employers can educate their employees on the purpose of storytelling, as well as the potential impact it can have on the organization and the community. Share this Guidebook with Peer Navigators on your team. Have them start by checking out the section for [Peer Navigators on Storytelling](#).
- **Encouraging dialogue:** Employers can create a safe space for Peer Navigators to ask questions and express their concerns about sharing their story. They should encourage open dialogue between the navigator and their supervisor or other staff members.
- **Providing support:** Employers can provide emotional support to their employees, including access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), counseling, or other resources, to help them navigate the potential emotional impact of sharing their story.
- **Ensuring consent and confidentiality:** Employers should ensure that Peer Navigators have given informed consent to share their story, and that appropriate measures are taken to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the navigator and any individuals mentioned in their story.
- **Highlighting the benefits:** Employers can highlight the benefits of sharing personal experiences, including the potential to make informed decisions, improve rapport with youth in programs, inspire donors, and create greater awareness of the organization and its impact

By providing education, support, and a safe space for dialogue, employers can help their employees understand the potential impact of sharing their story, while also ensuring that the Peer Navigator's emotional well-being and privacy are protected.

Preparing Peer Navigators for the Next Level of Employment

Employers should not pigeon-hole Peer Navigators into the role permanently.

As valued members of the team, Peer Navigators should have the opportunity for professional advancements. Employers should intentionally motivate, mentor, and support Peer Navigators with advancing their careers. There should be opportunities for Peer Navigators to elevate roles internally within the organization.

This may require organizations to rethink educational requirements for roles when possible. We encourage organizations to rethink the emphasis they place on expensive degrees. We ask organizations to also consider the vast education Peer Navigators have received about and within their communities, through their own lived experience. These lessons are extremely valuable and cannot be taught in a classroom.

Here are some additional ways that employers can motivate and support the career advancement of their Peer Navigators:

- **Professional development opportunities:** Employers can provide access to training and development opportunities that help Peer Navigators build new skills, gain new certifications, and advance their careers.
- **Mentoring and coaching:** Employers can provide mentorship and coaching to help Peer Navigators identify their career goals and develop strategies for achieving them.
- **Promotion and advancement opportunities:** Employers can provide clear pathways for advancement within the organization, and actively work to promote Peer Navigators to higher-level positions as they become available.
- **Networking and community building:** Employers can provide opportunities for Peer Navigators to network and build relationships with other professionals in their field, both within and outside of the organization.
- **Recognition and rewards:** Employers can recognize and reward the contributions of Peer Navigators, both through financial incentives and other forms of recognition, to help motivate and inspire them to continue advancing in their careers.

By motivating and supporting the career advancement of Peer Navigators, employers can help ensure that these important members of the organization are able to achieve their full potential and continue making a positive impact on the communities they serve.

Utilizing the Board of Directors

Organizations should consider including their Board of Directors in creating opportunities for Peer Navigators to advance their careers. Board members can provide valuable mentorship and networking opportunities, as well as insights into the broader community and professional landscape.

Board members can advocate for the professional development and advancement of Peer Navigators within the organization, and provide support and encouragement as they pursue their career goals. By involving their Board of Directors in supporting the career advancement of Peer Navigators, employers can help ensure that these important members of the organization have access to a wide range of support and resources, and are able to achieve their full potential.

Apprenticeships and Fellowships

Organizations can also offer apprenticeships or opportunities to shadow other colleagues within the organization. These should not be free-labor for the organization. Apprenticeship programs or fellowships should be paid, time-limited, and stipend based.

These types of opportunities can help Peer Navigators gain exposure to different aspects of the organization, build new skills, and develop a deeper understanding of the work being done across different departments and functions.

Here are some benefits of offering apprenticeships or shadowing opportunities for Peer Navigators:

- **Skill development:** Peer Navigators can learn new skills and techniques by observing and working with colleagues in other departments or functions.
- **Cross-functional understanding:** Shadowing or apprenticeship opportunities can help Peer Navigators develop a deeper understanding of how different parts of the organization work together to achieve common goals.
- **Networking:** By working with colleagues in other departments or functions, Peer Navigators can expand their professional network and build valuable relationships that can support their career development.
- **Career advancement:** By gaining exposure to different parts of the organization and building new skills, Peer Navigators may be better positioned to take on new roles and responsibilities within the organization over time.

Some examples of apprenticeship in other departments include:

- Operations department
- HR department
- Finance department
- Training department

Hiring Young People as Consultants

Community-based organizations should consider hiring young people as consultants. Young people with lived experience can provide valuable input for organizations when making all kinds of decisions.

Young people should be utilized and paid, similarly to other consultants in your organization. Most consultants are typically paid \$50-\$100 per hour; rates may vary based on experience. Consultants may work on a specific aspect of a project or they may be involved throughout the entire process.

Programs that are developed in partnership with youth are more likely to be effective at engaging the population and, therefore, to have a greater impact. Involving youth as partners in making decisions that affect them increases the likelihood that the decisions will be accepted, adopted, and become part of their everyday lives. Additionally, empowering youth to identify and respond to community needs helps them become empathetic, reflective individuals, setting them on a course to potentially continue this important work in their future.

Young people with lived experience have so much value to offer, even beyond the role of Peer Navigators.



BEST PRACTICES FOR PEER NAVIGATORS

We hope this handbook finds its way into the hands of Peer Navigators, who are working directly with young people.

This chapter is *for you*. In the pages ahead we'll be sharing our favorite tips and strategies for you to succeed in your role as a Peer Navigator.

Making the Most of Supervision

As a Peer Navigator, you may encounter a range of issues when working with other young adults.

It is important for Peer Navigators to bring any concerns or issues to their supervisor or employer for support and guidance. Some examples of issues that you may need to bring to supervision include:

- **Challenging Interactions with Clients**
Peer Navigators may encounter difficult situations with their mentees, such as behavior or attitude problems, conflicts or communication breakdowns, or issues related to mental health or substance use. It is important for Peer Navigators to seek guidance from their supervisor on how to handle these situations in a constructive and supportive way.
- **Personal Stress and Burnout**
Peer Navigators may experience stress and burnout due to the demands of their role and the emotional toll of working with other young adults in crisis. It is important for Peer Navigators to discuss these issues with their supervisor and develop strategies for self-care and stress management in the workplace.
- **Professional Development**
Peer Navigators may have questions or concerns about their professional development, such as how to improve their skills or advance in their career. It is important for Peer Navigators to seek guidance and support from their supervisor on how to develop and achieve their career goals.
- **Administrative and Logistical Issues**
Peer Navigators may encounter administrative or logistical issues related to their role, such as scheduling conflicts, paperwork or documentation requirements, or issues related to transportation or technology. It is important for Peer Navigators to communicate these issues to their supervisor and work together to find solutions.
- **Ethical and Boundary Issues**
Peer Navigators may encounter ethical or boundary issues in their role, such as confidentiality breaches or conflicts of interest. It is important for Peer Navigators to discuss these issues with their supervisor and seek guidance on how to handle them in accordance with ethical and professional standards.

It is important for Peer Navigators to maintain open and honest communication with their supervisor and seek support and guidance when needed. By working together to address challenges and concerns, Peer Navigators can be more effective and successful in their role.

If a Peer Navigator is feeling triggered, activated, or burnt out, there are several steps they can take to approach their supervisor in a constructive and professional way:

1. **Identify the Issue.** The Peer Navigator should take some time to reflect on what is triggering their burnout or stress. Is it a specific aspect of their work, such as working with a particular mentee or in a certain environment, or is it a more general feeling of overwhelm? Understanding the root cause of the issue can help the peer navigator communicate their needs more effectively.
2. **Schedule a Meeting with their Supervisor.** The Peer Navigator should request a meeting with their supervisor to discuss their concerns. This meeting should be scheduled in advance, and the peer navigator should come prepared with specific examples and suggestions for how they would like to be more supported.
3. **Communicate their Needs.** During the meeting, the Peer Navigator should clearly communicate their needs and concerns to their supervisor. This may include explaining why they are feeling triggered or burnt out and what changes they would like to make to address these issues.
4. **Propose a Solution.** The Peer Navigator should also come prepared with a proposed solution for how they can continue to contribute to the organization while addressing their needs. This might include scheduling more frequent supervision, seeking outside support through EAP, enlisting the support of a coworker, requesting a change in their mentee assignment, taking on a different role within the organization, or reducing their hours temporarily.
5. **Collaborate with their Supervisor.** The Peer Navigator should work collaboratively with their supervisor to find a solution that meets both their needs and the needs of the organization. This may involve negotiating the terms of their assignment, setting clear expectations and boundaries, or developing a plan for ongoing support and supervision.

Overall, by working together to find a solution, Peer Navigators, their team members, and supervisors can support their effectiveness and well-being in their role as Peer Navigators.

“Allow a safe space for the young person to discuss their feelings and thoughts. Be a listening ear. Help the young person talk through the task and whether or not completing it will be more harmful than good for them. Do not automatically reassign the task or take away the growth opportunity. Do not ignore the signs you are noticing. Do ask how you can best support the young person and do what they ask if in your power to do it.”

— **Anjala Huff**

Senior Director, Direct Cash Transfers, Point Source Youth

Sharing Your Own Story

There is so much value in Peer Navigators sharing their own stories and experiences — and it can be emotionally draining.

“Peer Navigators should be strategic when sharing their story,” says [Keona Rose](#), 2022 National Youth Advocate Cohort Member. Keona utilizes this helpful red light-green light resource, when deciding how much and when to share.



The infographic is titled "Strategic Sharing" in large, bold, dark blue letters on a yellow background. Below the title, the subtitle reads "Strategic Sharing: telling our life stories in a way that is meaningful, safe, and effective". The main content is organized into three columns, each with a colored speech bubble: a green bubble for "Green Light Statements" (okay to tell just about anyone this information), a yellow bubble for "Yellow Light Statements" (proceed with caution in sharing), and a red bubble for "Red Light Statements" (reserve only for situations where you are highly confident about the information you are disclosing and there is a high level of trust with the people you are speaking to). Below these three columns is a grey speech bubble titled "When deciding what to share, consider:" which lists four bullet points: "The audience", "Your comfort level/ comfort level of others", "Is this YOUR story?", and "Is this appropriate right now?".

<https://www.fosterclub.com/blog/public-policy/lex-leaders-meet-federal-foster-care-leadership>

Peer Navigators may be asked to share their stories for a variety of reasons:

- Educating staff or community members
- Fundraising purposes
- Connecting with program participants
- Providing perspective from lived experience.

Before telling their story, a Peer Navigator may want to consider the following questions:

- **What is the purpose of sharing my story?** It's important to understand the intended purpose of sharing their story, whether it's to raise awareness, inspire donors, or educate others.
- **How comfortable am I sharing my story?** Sharing personal experiences can be difficult, and it's important for the Peer Navigator to assess their level of comfort in sharing their story publicly.
- **Is there any information I want to keep private?** While it can be helpful to share personal experiences to connect with others, the Peer Navigator should consider if there are any details they want to keep private for personal or safety reasons.
- **How will sharing my story impact me emotionally?** Sharing personal experiences can be emotionally challenging, and the Peer Navigator should consider how sharing their story may impact them emotionally.
- **What message do I want to convey?** It's important for the Peer Navigator to identify the message they want to convey through sharing their story, whether it's to highlight the impact of the organization, influence decision-making, or inspire donors to support the cause.
- **What are the potential risks and benefits of sharing my story?** The Peer Navigator should consider the potential risks and benefits of sharing their story, including any potential negative reactions or backlash. They should also consider the potential positive impact on the organization, its fundraising efforts, program participants, and the larger community.

By asking themselves these questions, the Peer Navigator can assess their readiness and comfort level in sharing their story publicly, while also ensuring that they are conveying the message they want to convey and protecting their privacy and emotional well-being

Preparing for the Next Level of Employment

Ideally there is room for Peer Navigators to continue to grow and elevate within the organization.

Preparing for the next level of employment as a peer navigator involves taking proactive steps to develop new skills, expand your knowledge, and demonstrate your expertise and commitment to your field.

Here are some strategies that Peer Navigators can use to prepare for the next level of employment:

- **Seek additional training and education.** Look for opportunities to gain new skills or knowledge that can enhance your effectiveness as a peer navigator. This might include taking courses, attending workshops or conferences, or pursuing additional certification or credentials.
- **Build a professional network.** Connect with other professionals in your field and seek out mentors who can provide guidance and support. Participate in professional associations, attend networking events, and engage with online communities to build your network.

- **Demonstrate leadership skills.** Look for opportunities to take on leadership roles within your organization or community. This might involve leading a project, mentoring new Peer Navigators, or serving as a spokesperson for your organization.
- **Document your achievements.** Keep a record of your accomplishments and successes as a Peer Navigator, including any positive feedback you have received from mentees or supervisors. This can help you demonstrate your value to potential employers and prepare for interviews or performance evaluations.
- **Stay up-to-date on industry trends and developments.** Read industry publications, attend conferences, and stay informed about emerging trends and best practices in your field. This can help you stay ahead of the curve and position yourself as a thought leader in your area of expertise
- **Take advantage of opportunities.** If your employer has additional opportunities for mentorship, training, coaching, or apprenticeships, take advantage of them! These are made to empower you with your professional development.
- **Rest as resistance.** Remember to care for yourself and that you deserve to rest simply by being. Working in social justice and services is difficult. It can be more difficult when you share the same experiences and marginalized identities and experiences as the folks you are working with. Work life balance and good boundaries to keep your mental and emotional health

“Make it known at the very beginning that it’s okay to **ask for help or ask to slow down** and that its okay to take breaks.”

— **Mason Persons**



SUPERVISORY BEST PRACTICES

1

Supervision

Provide regular supervision and feedback to Peer Navigators to help them grow and develop in their role.

2

Evaluation

Establish clear goals and metrics for success and regularly evaluate the performance of Peer Navigators to ensure that they are meeting expectations and making a positive impact.

3

Collaboration

Encourage collaboration and teamwork among Peer Navigators, as well as with other staff members and community partners, to help maximize the impact of the peer navigation programs.

Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

In the effort to fully support Peer Navigators, sometimes the role between supervisor and therapist can become blurred. Boundaries are very important in this role.

By becoming too involved in the personal aspects of the Peer Navigator's life or story, significant harm can be done to the Peer Navigator:

- The Peer Navigator may not get the long-term support they need outside of the organization.
- The Peer Navigator may be viewed less professionally, stunting their opportunities for career advancement.
- The Peer Navigator may be viewed as less capable than their peers.
- The Supervisor may attempt to parent, influence, or take care of the Peer Navigator.

The Role of a Supervisor

The role of a supervisor is to provide guidance, support, and oversight to ensure that the peer navigator is effectively fulfilling their responsibilities and meeting the needs of the organization and its clients. Some of the specific responsibilities of a supervisor of a peer navigator may include:

- **Training and orientation.** The supervisor should provide initial and ongoing training to the peer navigator to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their job effectively.
- **Supervision and performance management.** The supervisor should provide ongoing supervision and performance management to the peer navigator, including regular check-ins, goal-setting, and feedback to ensure that the peer navigator is meeting their objectives and performing at a high level.

- **Case review and consultation.** The supervisor should review cases with the peer navigator to ensure that they are providing appropriate services to clients and adhering to organizational policies and procedures. The supervisor may also provide consultation to the peer navigator to help them address challenging cases or situations.
- **Professional development.** The supervisor should support the peer navigator's ongoing professional development by identifying opportunities for training, skill-building, and career advancement.
- **Team collaboration.** The supervisor should encourage collaboration and teamwork among Peer Navigators and other staff members to ensure that clients receive comprehensive and coordinated services.
- **Personal support.** The supervisor should not get overly involved in the personal aspects of a peer navigator's life. The supervisor should maintain appropriate boundaries. The supervisor should educate the Peer Mentor on resources available to them as an employee of the organization, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or healthcare benefits.
- **Trauma informed supervision.** Supervisors should pay attention to the emotional impact that trauma work has on the peer navigator. Supervisors should be knowledgeable about trauma and should create opportunities for empowerment and choice, within the supervision process.

The role of a supervisor is to provide guidance, support, and leadership to ensure that the peer navigator is performing at their best and meeting the needs of the organization and its clients. By working collaboratively with their supervisor, Peer Navigators can develop their skills and expertise and provide the best possible service to their clients.

How are you showing up today? How can I best support you? How is the work you are doing impacting you? How is your life outside of work?

The Role of the Peer Navigator

During supervision, the role of a peer navigator is to engage in a collaborative process aimed at supporting the navigator's professional development, improving their performance, and addressing any challenges or concerns that may arise in their work with clients. During supervision, the peer navigator may:

- **Discuss cases.** The navigator may discuss cases with their supervisor to get feedback on their approach, explore new strategies, and identify areas for improvement.
- **Receive guidance.** The navigator may receive guidance from their supervisor on how to best support their clients and handle challenging situations.
- **Review progress.** The navigator may review their progress with their supervisor, including progress towards their goals, successes, and areas for improvement.

- **Reflect on their own experiences.** The navigator may reflect on their own experiences, including their reactions to challenging situations, and explore ways to better manage their own emotional responses.
- **Receive feedback.** The navigator may receive feedback from their supervisor on their performance, including strengths and areas for improvement.

Overall, the goal of supervision for a peer navigator is to help them develop their skills, knowledge, and expertise, while providing support and guidance to ensure that they are effectively serving their clients. By engaging in regular supervision Peer Navigators can improve their performance and provide the best possible service to their clients.

Documenting Supervision

Trauma-informed supervision is a critical tool that reduces burnout, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue among all staff. It's particularly important with Peer Navigators since their lived experience closely mirrors that of the youth in your programs.

Trauma informed supervision helps protect Peer Navigators from the impacts of painful experiences with clients by offering Peer Navigators empathy, support, and care. Some examples of trauma-informed supervision include attention to the emotional impact that trauma work has on the Peer Navigator, knowledge and education of trauma and how trauma affects systems and individuals, attention to a peer navigator's avoidance to discuss client's trauma stories in supervision, and supervision that is grounded in empowerment and choice which parallels the trauma-informed care movement.¹⁴

Trauma-informed supervision is just one component of trauma-informed care. Trauma informed care is a system-wide approach to the work that community organizations provide which recognizes that trauma is pervasive and seeks to mitigate its impact.

The Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Safety | 4. Collaboration and Mutuality |
| 2. Trustworthiness and Transparency | 5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice |
| 3. Peer Support | 6. Awareness of Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues |

For more information, check out [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach Guide](#).¹⁵

Documentation is an essential component of high-quality supervision. It can be very helpful to document the responsibilities of a peer navigator and supervisor. It can act as a sort of action plan between the two.

A supervision document or template tells each party what they can expect from the other and can also help the peer navigator develop core competencies. Check out [this resource](#) to create and document SMARTIE goals.¹⁶

The 2022 National Youth Advocates suggested the following check-in questions for supervisors to consider:

- How are you adjusting?
- Do you need support?
- What's something positive that you've done or that has happened to you this week? How's _____ going? (Checking on personal goals, progress on life events, education, etc.)
- How are you feeling today? Your current mood sets the tone for the rest of the meeting, which applies vice versa.
- What are you working on right now and how does each task fit into your capacity? What is the most challenging for you?
- What makes you feel confident?
- What are you doing to de-stress?
- Is there someone you would like to help you with this task?
- Are there any generational differences with colleagues or in the workplace that present an obstacle?
- Is there any professional development that we can assist you with? Do you have any personal or professional goals/tasks you are working towards?
- "What do you need from me?"
- "How is your work-life balance?"
- "What was hard this week?"
- "How are you feeling about the coming week and any ongoing projects?"
- What are you doing as professional self-care and what are you doing as personal selfcare.
- What support do you need from me and/or the organization?
- What projects are you currently excited to be working on?
- What projects / tasks have been challenging for you?

Getting Outside Support

The Difference Between Supervision and Therapy

While we encourage trauma-informed supervision to be supportive, it should not be therapy.

With the help of the 2022 National Youth Advocates we've created the following Venn Diagram to help you differentiate between the role of supervisor and therapist.

If the Peer Navigator brings up feelings, issues, or concerns that would be better discussed with a therapist, the supervisor should maintain appropriate boundaries and educate the peer navigator on the resources available to them.

Supervisor

- Supports work performance & professional development
- Provides direct support day-to-day work
- Evaluates work performance & providing feedback on areas for improvement

Both

- Teaches new skills
- Provides structure
- Offers guidance
- Identifies strengths
- Reflects and clarifies
- Processes development
- Promotes growth
- Helps decrease burnout

- Supports mental health & well-being
- Provides holistic support
- Creates a safe space to explore emotions & experiences.

Therapist

Media Training

Organizations may consider enlisting the help of a Public Relations firm to provide Peer Navigators with media training.

This is an important professional development opportunity that can help Peer Navigators become better public speakers. If Peer Navigators are asked to share their story at fundraising events or conferences, this will be especially helpful.

Media training can cover a range of topics, including:

- **Crafting a clear and concise message.** This involves identifying the key messages the peer navigator wants to convey, and developing a clear and concise way of communicating them.
- **Interview preparation.** This includes practicing how to answer questions, developing a list of potential questions, and practicing responses to challenging questions.
- **Nonverbal communication.** This includes body language, tone of voice, and other nonverbal cues that can impact how the peer navigator is perceived by the audience.
- **Addressing potentially sensitive topics.** This includes how to address sensitive or controversial topics with sensitivity and respect, while also conveying the peer navigator's point of view.
- **Understanding the media landscape.** This includes understanding how different media outlets operate, what types of stories they cover, and how to best tailor the peer navigator's story for different audiences.

By providing media training, employers can help their Peer Navigators feel more prepared and confident in sharing their story for fundraising and outreach purposes, while also ensuring that the peer navigator's emotional well-being and privacy are protected.

Department of Labor

The Department of Labor has laws in place to protect Peer Navigators, provide reasonable accommodations, and ensure employees are treated fairly.

For additional support, please see the section on [DOL laws and resources](#).

CONCLUSION

We thank you for your commitment to ending youth homelessness. Here at Point Source Youth we believe that youth should be trusted to direct their own lives and that leadership by and advancement of the young people most impacted by the crisis of homelessness is paramount.

Peer Navigation is such a powerful way to uplift the power of historically marginalized young people.

We understand this is challenging work. And we hope that this Handbook helps prepare you for what's ahead. Employing young people as Peer Navigators is essential. We hope that you take this handbook back to your organization and community and use it to kickstart your own peer navigation programs.

We'd be honored to partner in this work.

In need of further support and resources? Reach out to the Point Source Youth Team at programs@pointsourceyouth.org for inquiries on technical assistance and capacity-building!

ENDNOTES

- 1 [Academic-2.pdf \(mentoring.org\)](#)
- 2 [Workplace Loyalties Change, but the Value of Mentoring Doesn't - Knowledge at Wharton \(upenn.edu\)](#)
- 3 [Congressional Peer Navigating Caucus - MENTOR](#)
- 4 [Peer mentoring in the workplace: 10 benefits and best practices \(bigthink.com\)](#)
- 5 [What Efficient Mentorship Looks Like \(hbr.org\)](#)
- 6 [The living wage could lead to social and environmental sustainability \(phys.org\)](#)
- 7 [The Key To Diversity And Inclusion Is Mentorship \(forbes.com\)](#)
- 8 [<https://www.acc.com/resource-library/awarding-employee-bonuses-nonprofit-organization-united-states>](#)
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- 14 Carolyn Knight & L. DiAnne Borders (2018) Trauma-informed supervision: Core components and unique dynamics in varied practice contexts, The Clinical Supervisor, 37:1, 1-6.
- 15 [\[https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf\]\(https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf\)](#)
- 16 [<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1u8QyjtUuAxIHO0c1DeHYu5O8BT3e-wL9TpaWiV5CZGQ/edit>](#)