

Promoting Growth and Leadership in VHA Peer Specialist Professional Development: Continuing Education & Participation in Organizational Activities

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Expected Competency Areas for for VHA Peer Support Staff

Competency

A specific range of skill, knowledge, and ability to do something successfully, being adequately or well qualified for the condition of being capable of to meet demands, requirements

- ❖ Recovery Principles
- ❖ Peer Support Practices
- ❖ Cultural Competence
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Recovery & Personal Wellness Goals
- ❖ Whole Health Approach to Services
- ❖ Managing Crisis and Emergency Situations

- ❖ Community Integration/Reintegration
- ❖ Group Facilitation
- ❖ Advocacy
- ❖ Use of Recovery Tools
- ❖ Workplace Skills
- ❖ Professional Development

The complete list of expected knowledge and skill areas can be found on the VHA Peer Support Services SharePoint in the “Training” folder:

<https://vaww.cmopnational.va.gov/CR/MentalHealth/Peer%20Support%20Services/Training/October%202015%20Revised%20List%20of%20VHA%20Peer%20Support%20Staff%20Competencies.pdf>

Related VHA Peer Support Staff Competencies

Here are some of the expected knowledge and skills for peer specialists in VHA that are related to workplace skills and professional development.

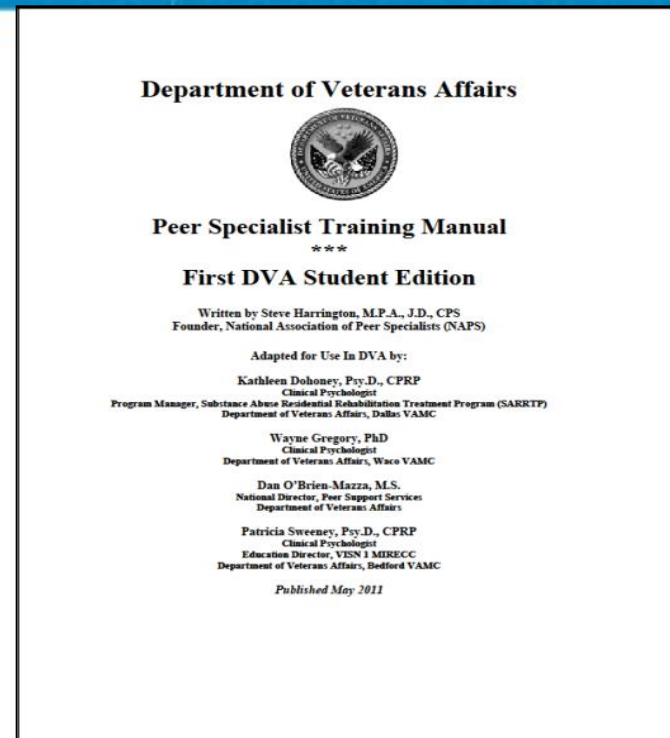
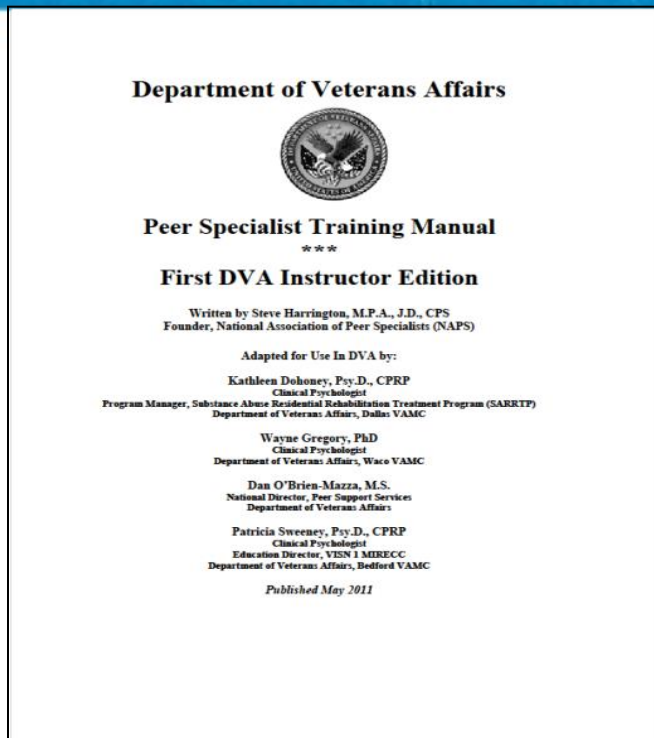
Workplace Skills Domain

- ❖ Participates as an active member in interdisciplinary team discussions.
- ❖ Maintains appropriate professional boundaries with Veterans, Veterans' families, and colleagues.
- ❖ Completes documentation by required deadlines.
- ❖ Demonstrates capability in effectively dealing with conflict and difficult interpersonal interactions in the workplace.
- ❖ Demonstrates effective communication skills and professionalism in use of technologies (ex. phone, email).

Professional Development Domain

- ❖ Keeps current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery practices and shares this knowledge with colleagues and Veterans.
- ❖ Participates in continuing education activities to meet annual training requirements and maintain the peer specialist certification.
- ❖ Uses supervision (mentoring, reflection) effectively by monitoring oneself and the peer specialist's work relationships with others, preparing agendas for the meetings, and addressing problems by engaging in solution-oriented discussions with the supervisor.

Resource for VHA Peer Support Staff: Training Manuals



Download training manuals from the VHA Peer Support Services SharePoint:

<https://vaww.cmopnational.va.gov/CR/MentalHealth/Peer%20Support%20Services/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2FCR%2FMentalHealth%2FPeer%20Support%20Services%2FTraining&FolderCTID=ox0120007ED8487946EC4541ABCE3721142E15E8&View={008B4700-3813-41FD-BoB1-0C15380837Bo}>.

VHA Policies Regarding Certification & Continuing Education Requirements for Peer Support Staff

- ❖ VHA policy requires that all peer support staff members receive their peer specialist certification which they can either obtain through a state-approved certification training program prior to their employment or through successful participation in the VHA-contracted peer specialist certification training program after being hired.
- ❖ Current VHA policy requires that all peer support staff obtain **15** hours of continuing education units (CEUs) every year (VHA Handbook 1163.05, p. 7). In the future, the VHA policy requirement may be reduced to 12 hours per year which is pending approval from VHA central administration offices.
- ❖ If a VHA peer specialist obtained his/her certification through a state-approved certification training program, the peer specialist is also required to abide by that training organization's CEU requirements to maintain the certification.

Responsibilities of VHA Peer Support Staff

- ❖ It is the responsibility of all VHA peer support staff members to maintain all VHA required hours of CEUs each year as well as any additional CEUs required by the certification organization to maintain their certification as peer specialists.
- ❖ It is the peer support staff members' responsibility to ensure that all supporting documentation (ex. training certificates) are given to their supervisors as well as any other party that needs to keep track of the CEU information each year.

Find a Mechanism to Track VHA Peer Support Staff's CEUs

Example Continuing Education Tracking Form

<u>Title of Presentation</u>	<u>Date(s) of Presentation</u>	<u>Location of Presentation</u>	<u>Names of Presenter(s)</u>	<u>Number of CEUs Awarded</u>

Models for Obtaining Continuing Education & Continued Professional Growth as a Peer Specialist

There are many ways that you can obtain further training and opportunities for ongoing professional development as a VHA peer specialist

1. Attend formal trainings in and outside of VHA.
 - ❖ Conferences
 - ❖ Local VHA facility presentations
 - ❖ Trainings on the Department of Veterans Affairs Talent Management System (TMS) website: <https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/login.jsp>
 - ❖ Webinars
2. Participate in mutual learning opportunities with other peer support staff at your local VHA facility and/or within the VISN.
3. Pursue professional development opportunities to be a presenter and/or workgroup participant in and/or outside of VHA.

Model #1 for Continuing Education: Attend Conferences & Local VHA Facility Presentations

❖ Examples of National Conferences with Peer Support-Related Topics:

- International Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS) Annual Conference: <http://inaops.org/>.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Annual Convention: <http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=convention>.
- Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association Annual Conference: <http://psychrehabassociation.org/events>.
- VHA Peer Specialist Conference

❖ Examples of VHA Presentations:

- VISN-wide conference or webinar for VHA staff
- Local VHA facility Grand Rounds or Schwartz Rounds
- Local VHA facility conference



Model #1 for Continuing Education: Attend Free Webinars or Online Courses



- ❖ Depression Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)—webinar offered monthly: http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=education_webinars.
- ❖ Doors to Wellbeing: <http://www.doorstowellbeing.org/#!/spring-webinar-series/lk5hh>.
- ❖ International Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS)—webinar offered monthly: <http://inaops.org/free-webinar-series/>.
- ❖ Magellan Health—free online courses: <http://www.magellanhealth.com/continuing-education.aspx>
- ❖ SAMHSA Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS): <http://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/webinars>.
- ❖ VHA Peer Support Staff Webinar Series—webinar offered monthly for VHA peer support staff on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 2:00 PM – 3:30 PM EST; past webinar presentations are archived in both the “Presentations” and “Training” folders on the VHA Peer Support Services SharePoint that can be accessed by VHA employees: <https://vaww.cmopnational.va.gov/CR/MentalHealth/Peer%20Support%20Services/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

** *The Compendium of Training and Self-Study Resources for Recovery Peer Specialists and Recovery Support Specialists (2015)* is a useful resource for finding additional trainings and self-study courses: http://flcertificationboard.org/assets/uploads/2015_Compndium-of-Training-and-Study-Resources_Final.pdf.

Model #1 for Continuing Education: Pursue Specialized Training and Certification

Examples of Non-VHA Opportunities:

- ❖ Certification as a Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioner (CPRP):
<http://www.uspra.org/certification/cprp-certification>
- ❖ Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Gatekeeper and Gatekeeper Instructor Trainings in Suicide Prevention: <http://www.qprinstitute.com/>
- ❖ Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Facilitator Training and Train-the-Trainer Training:
<https://copelandcenter.com/our-services/wrap-facilitator-training>

Examples of Opportunities in VHA:

- ❖ Facility LEAD Program: This training program is for both managerial and non-managerial staff. You can learn more about problem-solving, working toward larger program goals in an accurate and efficient manner, and working successfully with teams in complex work conditions.
- ❖ Social Skills Group Facilitator Training:
http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/social_skills.asp
- ❖ Veteran “X” Training: For more information, contact Tom Pratt, CPSS at Thomas.Pratt2@va.gov

Model #2 for Continuing Education: Participate in Mutual Learning Opportunities Other VHA Peer Specialists—Examples



- ❖ In some VHA facilities, seasoned peer specialists are facilitating group meetings with the other newer peer support staff members on a biweekly or monthly basis where educational materials are introduced for group discussion (ex. chapters from the *Department of Veterans Affairs Peer Specialist Training Manual*) about how the topic relates to the peer specialists' work.
- ❖ In some VHA facilities, the local recovery coordinator (or other peer support champion) facilitates a group meeting with the peer support staff where the local recovery coordinator and/or peer specialists take turns presenting on topics related to the roles and responsibilities of the peer specialists.
- ❖ Peer specialists can participate in the VHA National Peer Support Mentoring Program either as a mentor or mentee. Applications for the mentor and mentee roles and more information can be found in the “National Peer Support Mentoring Program” folder on the VHA Peer Support Services SharePoint:
<https://vaww.cmopnational.va.gov/CR/MentalHealth/Peer%20Support%20Services/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.
- ❖ Something for you to consider—What are the opportunities that you already have or can develop that can allow you to connect with other peer support staff at your facility and/or your VISN for mutual learning?

Model #3 for Continuing Education & Professional Development: Pursue Opportunities to be a Presenter

- ❖ Developing and facilitating a presentation offers many opportunities for learning and growth, and being a presenter requires several skills:
 - Ability to recognize the audience's needs and meet those needs through the development of the presentation content and ability to address audience members' questions
 - Solid written and verbal communication skills
 - Good organizational and time management skills
 - Good interpersonal skills—Ability to relate well to the audience and engage them with the presentation material

- ❖ Many VHA peer specialists are interested in presenting at conferences and/or on webinars.

- ❖ If you are interested in being a presenter, talk with your supervisor who can be helpful in the following ways:
 - Encourage you to discuss your professional development interests.
 - Brainstorm ideas together of how you can gain experience in being a presenter.
 - Help you identify what new knowledge and skills you need to acquire to meet your goal (ex. learning how to use PowerPoint). Afterward, your supervisor can help you identify resources that you can use to acquire the needed knowledge and new skills.

Criteria to be a Presenter for VHA Peer Support-Related National Conferences and Webinars

Peer Specialist Criteria:

- ❖ Peer specialists (GS-6 or higher, not GS-5 peer support apprentices) who have been employed in their current role as a peer specialist for at least one year or more within VHA. Peer specialists with an established career as a peer specialist prior to VHA employment will be considered.
- ❖ Peer specialists who have knowledge and significant experience using a skill related to the presentation topic as well as significant experience teaching that skill to others.
- ❖ Peer specialists who have done, at minimum, at least one presentation related to the topic either for their local facility, the VISN, local community, and/or a significant presentation in a non-VHA forum (ex. presentation for a community organization; presentation at non-VA national conference or webinar; etc.). **Experience presenting educational materials in recovery groups or small peer support trainings at the local facility does not meet this requirement.**

Supervisor Criteria:

- ❖ Peer support supervisors who have been working as a supervisor of peer support staff for at least one year within VHA. Peer support supervisors who have done, at a minimum, at least one presentation related to the topic either for their local facility, the VISN, and/or a significant presentation in a non-VHA forum (ex. presentation for a community organization; presentation at non-VA national conference or webinar; etc.).

Criteria for All Presenters:

- ❖ When possible, the preference is to have co-presenters who have a previously established fluid working relationship such as two peer specialists, a peer specialist and his/her supervisor, and/or two peer support supervisors.
- ❖ The subject matter of the presentation will be able to be implemented at most VHA sites.
- ❖ Candidates will submit a brief outline of the presentation and learning objectives for review by the planning committee.

Model #3 for Continuing Education & Professional Development: Pursue Opportunities to be a Participant in a Committee or Workgroup

- ❖ Participating in, and possibly leading, a committee or workgroup offers many opportunities for learning and growth, and it requires several skills:
 - Ability to recognize and clearly articulate the purpose of the workgroup and its expected product(s)
 - Solid written and verbal communication skills
 - Good organizational and time management skills
 - Solid interpersonal skills—ability to collaborate with others, share ideas, demonstrate respect for others' points of view, and willingness to be flexible and adaptable as the workgroup's task may require
- ❖ Many VHA peer specialists are interested in participating in committees and/or workgroups where they can make a valuable contribution and have their voices heard.
- ❖ If you are interested in this type of professional activity, talk with your supervisor who can be helpful in the following ways:
 - Encourage you to discuss your professional development interests.
 - Brainstorm ideas of how you can gain experience in participating in a committee or workgroup at your local facility, in the VISN, and/or a national workgroup.
 - Help you identify what new knowledge and skills you need to acquire to meet your goal (ex. creating a structured agenda for meetings). Afterward, your supervisor can help you identify resources that you can use to acquire the needed knowledge and new skills.

Examples of Workgroups Involving VHA Peer Specialists

Non-VHA Workgroups:

- ❖ Development of International Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS) National Ethical Guidelines and Practice Standards:
<http://na4ps.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/nationalguidelines1.pdf>.
- ❖ Development of current Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International) Behavioral Health Standards on Peer Support Services

VHA National Workgroups:

- ❖ Development of VHA peer support expected skills and competencies
- ❖ Development of VHA peer support competency assessment tool
- ❖ Selection of VHA-contracted peer specialist certification training organization
- ❖ Revision of structured interview guide for VHA peer support staff
- ❖ Planning committees for training events:
 - VHA peer support supervisors conferences
 - VHA peer specialist conferences
 - VHA peer support staff webinar series

Creating Your Professional Development Learning Plan



Creating a Professional Development Learning Plan

- ❖ First, ask yourself, “What do I need to do within the next year to grow as a peer specialist?”
 - Review the elements of the peer specialist job performance standards and the list of VHA Peer Support Competencies. Is there an area where you could improve in your current knowledge and/or skills that will help with your annual performance review?
 - Is there a role/responsibility that you are interested in and would like to add to what you currently do? (ex. Become a member of one of the local VHA facility’s committees; teach a national webinar; etc.)
- ❖ Do a self-assessment of your strengths, needs, abilities, and preferences.
- ❖ Identify goals, objectives, and strategies for accomplishing your goal in the year.
- ❖ Take action and do it!

Example Professional Development Learning Plan

- ❖ A new peer specialist has been working in a VHA psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center (PRRC) for 3 months. She's been leading peer support groups and performing the core peer specialist skills and competencies very well for her level of experience.
- ❖ The peer specialist wants more tools to use with Veterans, especially Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP), and the program director would like her to lead more curriculum-based groups.

Self-Assessment:

- ❖ Strengths: fast learner; WRAP foundation; excellent collaborator with staff
- ❖ Resources Needed: WRAP Facilitator Training; WRAP books; leave/coverage
- ❖ Abilities: group facilitation skills; personal WRAP implementation; recruiting group participants
- ❖ Preferences: not needing to travel far away for training; to use PowerPoint when facilitating her WRAP group

Example Professional Development Learning Plan

Goal: Within a year, facilitate a WRAP class in the PRRC.

Objectives:

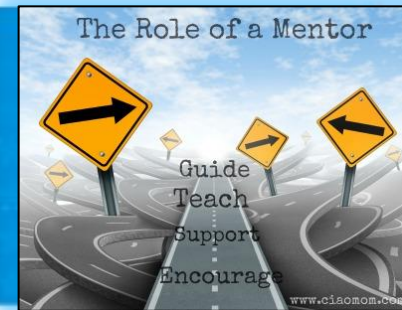
1. Complete a WRAP Facilitator Training within the VISN by January.
 - Peer specialist will identify an available training and register.
 - Supervisor will work with peer specialist to obtain funding and arrange travel.
 - Supervisor will plan coverage in the PRRC and approve the peer specialist's leave from the program.
 - Supervisor will develop knowledge of WRAP to improve supervision competency
2. Read WRAP books by March.
 - Peer specialist will identify books and send purchase order information to the supervisor.
 - Supervisor will advocate for payment of the purchases with the facility's leadership.
3. Complete PowerPoint class by December.
 - Peer specialist to identify a class and register.

Find a Mentor to Assist with Your Professional Development Learning Plan



- ❖ Integrate discussion of your professional development learning plan into meetings with your supervisor.
 - Write a draft of your plan. Review and edit it as needed with your supervisor.
 - Collaboratively negotiate with your supervisor about how often the plan will be part of your supervision meeting discussions (weekly? monthly? quarterly? etc.).
- ❖ If you do not want to discuss your professional development learning plan with your supervisor (or if you do not have a supervisor), find another mentor who can meet with you and brainstorm ways to meet your professional development goals.

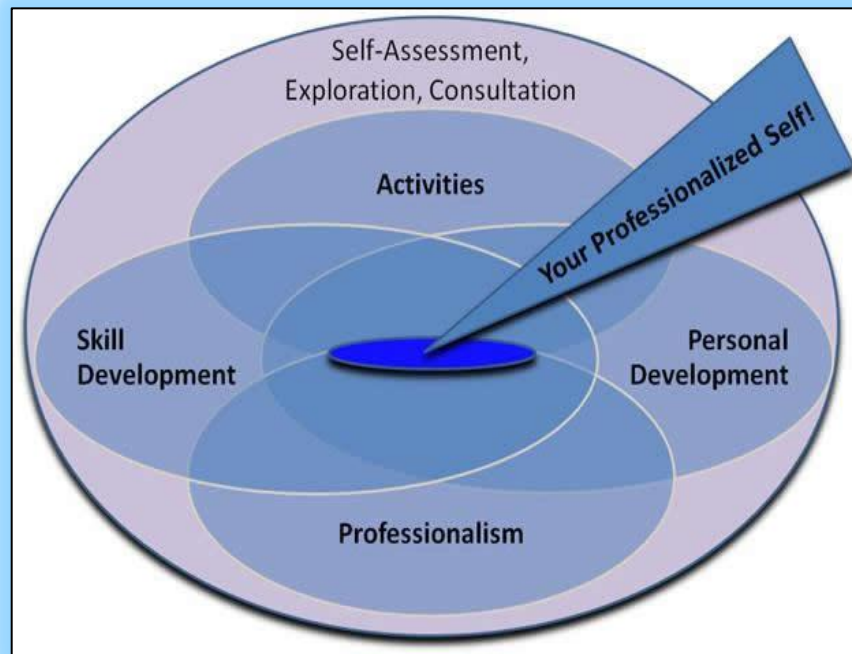
Tips for Choosing a Mentor



- ❖ Don't ask a stranger. Ask someone you already work with who inspires you and is familiar with your potential, your strengths, and your growth edges.
- ❖ Be clear about what you want to get out of the mentor-mentee relationship and communicate it to the potential mentor.
- ❖ Be someone who would be enjoyable to mentor.
 - Be great at what you already do.
 - Ask for more responsibility and have specific ideas of what you can contribute.
 - "Don't be a wallflower." Participate in all team meetings and come prepared ahead of time to help advance the discussions.
 - Promote the success of others. Be generous and demonstrate openness to new ideas/ways of doing things. These behaviors will be remembered.
 - Build your support network of colleagues at your facility and at other sites. Learn what they do and how you can be supportive of their work.
- ❖ Put yourself in your mentor's shoes.
 - If you often received requests for help from other peer specialists, what type of person would you choose to mentor and why? Be the person that others would love to support and nurture in your career.

Practice Exercise: Write a Draft Professional Development Learning Plan

Please refer to the provided handout entitled, “Promoting VHA Peer Specialist Professional Development Practice Exercise.” Read each question and write your answers in the accompanying text box.



References

- ❖ Caprino, K. (2014, September 21). How to find a great mentor—First, don't ever ask a stranger. *Forbes*. Retrieved September 10, 2015, from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2014/09/21/how-to-find-a-great-mentor-first-dont-ever-ask-a-stranger/>.
- ❖ McCormick, J. (2015, April). Effective use of supervision. Plenary presentation at the *Practices in VA Peer Support: Basic, Improved, and Innovative Next Steps for a New Career in VHA* April 21-23, 2015 VHA Peer Specialist Conference in Orlando, Florida.

Contact for the New England MIRECC Peer Education Center

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