

**The Oregon Consortium & Oregon Workforce Alliance
Requirements for a Rapid Response Peer Program Policy WIA-50-10/11**

Date: October 17, 2011

Subject: Requirements for a Rapid Response Peer Program

References: NA

Purpose:

To provide Regional Contractor with guidance on using a Rapid Response Peer Program.

Background:

The goal of a Rapid Response Peer Program is to develop a support structure to assist workers who are going through the difficult transition period of rapid change and uncertainty that follows job loss. Peers are selected from the affected workforce to provide information to other affected workers, assist those workers to overcome resistance to using available services as well as advocate on behalf of the affected workers and act as a liaison with agency and community professionals. Peers also assist the affected workers to deal with denial, anger, fear, stress and barriers of employment loss as they affect future employment. Peers may also assist communities in finding and accessing resources needed to develop a community coordinated response to the dislocation. Peers, in general, are most utilized during significant layoff events that warrant National Emergency Grants.

Peer staff serve as a comfortable connection between workers and the dislocated worker program that helps to demystify and maximize the use of services. They are a source of program information, a friendly face, and a sympathetic ear in a difficult time. On the personal level, they are able to validate what people are feeling, break down isolation, help people initiate the planning process and help overcome resistance to retraining/reemployment opportunities.

While peer staff has a major role to play in helping people deal with the layoff experience, it is also important to recognize the limits of their role. They are not professional service providers, therapists, or social workers. They act as paraprofessional staff to make the work of the professional staff more effective.

Definitions:

Paraprofessional: A trained worker who is not a member of a given profession but assists a professional.

Policy:

The Regional Contractor will employ or subcontract individuals as Peers for dislocation events when merited. Peers shall meet minimum qualifications in a paraprofessional job

classification and be individuals hired directly from the workforce that was impacted by job loss. The Peer services will be those relevant to the specific dislocation event and tend to be limited duration, one to three months.

Responsibilities:

Regional Contractor

- Work closely with The Oregon Consortium (TOC/OWA), WSO Dislocated Worker Unit (DWU), applicable labor organizations and the dislocation employer or former employer (to the extent possible).
- Work with the employer of Peers to help that agency understand the desirable qualities needed in peers so that the peers can be successful in the project, and the conditions peers need to conduct their work, if the Regional Contractor is not the employer of record.
- Coordinate with TOC/OWA and the WSO DWU in training Peer Workers and receiving technical support as needed.
- Support Peers in meeting programmatic measurements and ensure there is a clear delineation between peer and staff duties and responsibilities.
- Establish a rate of pay considering equity relative to others working for Regional Contractor, comparability with wages earned prior to layoff; and State regulations or policy that may establish the wage. Consideration should be given to cost of continuation of the peer's health coverage.
- Recognize the Peer will have pre-existing relationships with many of the affected workers, counsel the Peer on professional behavior and make appropriate adjustments to the Peer arrangement if these relationships impair the ability of the Peer to function fairly and effectively.
- Ensure the Peer employment agreement is documented in the individual's electronic participant record as an incumbent worker (for instance, case noting the start/projected end date of temporary employment and noting that an employment agreement is on file).
- During the time the individual is temporarily employed as a Peer, ensure dislocation services such as support services and tuition are suspended, unless a management override at the Regional Contractor level is justified, documented and case noted as necessary and reasonable.
- Ensure that a Peer will be assigned only those duties appropriate to the role; for example, a Peer is neither a case manager nor a front-line staff person and does not have privileges to authorize direct participant payments.

Peer

Provide paraprofessional response services relevant to the specific dislocation event and tend to be limited duration and may include:

- Help dislocated workers individually or collectively explore their

- options, opportunities, and obstacles to further employment.
- Gain a working knowledge of the various local social service agencies, local community service opportunities and the WIA Delivery System to facilitate making appropriate referrals to those organizations.
 - Compile and maintain a list of all known affected workers for the purposes of tracking.
 - Be available during the hours of employment as a Peer to help the affected workers with information about programs, referrals to programs and services, and enrolling in programs.
 - Refer potential applicants to the appropriate service provider offices for established services such as job search assistance, in-depth assessment, intake and eligibility determination.
 - Function as the worker advocate to ensure all appropriate services are available to them.
 - Maintain the confidentiality of information and the integrity of data including, but not limited to, participant, employee, financial and Regional Contractor.
 - Track Peer activity including the number, method and outcomes of Peer contacts, attendance at community/other meeting(s) or outreach activities, and identify any unanticipated problems/benefits with the program.

TOC/OWA

- Coordinate with WSO DWU to provide training and technical support to the Regional Contractor and/or Peers.

Actions Required:

Regional Contractor must ensure that appropriate staff is apprised of and complies with the requirements in this policy.

Inquiries:

Inquires should be addressed to TOC/OWA at 1-866-888-4TOC.


Kris Latimer
Chief Executive Officer