



# CHAPTER GUIDE

## Facilitating Peer Learning Cohorts for CACs

This guide is designed to help Chapters create and facilitate successful Peer Learning Cohorts for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). Peer Learning Cohorts offer an opportunity for Chapters to provide ways for CACs across their state to collaborate, share experiences, and learn from one another to enhance their organizations' effectiveness and impact.

## Overview

This guide is designed to help Chapters create and facilitate successful Peer Learning Cohorts for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). Peer Learning Cohorts offer an opportunity for Chapters to provide ways for CACs across their state to collaborate, share experiences, and learn from one another to enhance their organizations' effectiveness and impact. In the context of CACs, Peer Learning Cohorts are designed to bring together leaders, staff, or representatives from the multidisciplinary team to share insights, best practices, and solutions related to the challenges they face in their work. These Cohorts provide a supportive and safe environment for open dialogue, problem-solving, and professional development. They can also identify gaps in group knowledge by addressing them with education and building professional confidence.

Positive outcomes from Peer Learning Cohorts include:

- **Increased motivation and engagement.** Peer learning can be a great way to stay motivated and engaged in learning. When you're learning with others, you're more likely to feel accountable and to stay on track.
- **Improved understanding of concepts.** Peer learning can help staff to better understand concepts by giving them the opportunity to discuss them with others. Learning different perspectives can promote a growth mindset.
- **Enhanced networking opportunities.** Peer learning can be a great way to network with others in their field. They can learn from each other's experiences and build relationships that can help decrease isolation. There may also be the possibility of developing mentorship opportunities. Giving CAC staff opportunities to share their expertise with others can increase overall job satisfaction and support retention.

Peer Learning Cohorts are small groups of individuals or organizations who come together to engage in a collaborative learning experience. The participants in these Cohorts typically share common interests, goals, or challenges and seek to learn from one another's experiences. The concept of peer learning emphasizes the power of collective wisdom, where each member contributes their unique knowledge and expertise to benefit the entire group.

Chapters are in a great position to connect CACs and facilitate the formation of Peer Learning Cohorts in their state. You hear the common issues and concerns your members bring to you and have a sense of which professionals serving CACs would most benefit from a learning cohort.

### Key Features of Peer Learning Cohorts

1. **Shared Learning:** Participants have the opportunity to exchange knowledge, experiences, and expertise, enabling them to gain valuable insights from their peers.
2. **Collaboration:** Cohort members work together to address shared challenges and collaboratively find solutions.
3. **Community Building:** Cohorts create a sense of community among participants, fostering relationships and networking opportunities.
4. **Accountability:** Cohort members can hold each other accountable for setting and achieving their goals and objectives.
5. **Professional Development:** Participants can enhance their skills, leadership abilities, and knowledge through the cohort's collective learning experiences.

6. **Safe Space for Sharing:** Peer Learning Cohorts provide a non-competitive and supportive space where individuals can openly discuss their challenges, seek advice, receive emotional support, and celebrate successes.
7. **Diverse Perspectives:** The diversity of participants' backgrounds, experiences, and organizations contributes to a broader range of perspectives and approaches to problem-solving.
8. **Continued Communication:** Cohorts often continue communication and collaboration between formal meetings, using technology platforms or other means to maintain connections.

### Example of How This Looks for a CAC (Victim Advocacy Peer Learning Cohort)

Monthly meetings could provide:

- Sharing of resources based on the groups interest and needs
- Sharing of research relevant to the field with group discussion
- Opportunities for peer case review and support with challenging cases
- Opportunities to learn ways to strengthen advocacy and team building skills
- Guest speakers on topics related to addressing secondary traumatic stress, court support, working collaboratively with court and community advocates, etc.

Monthly meetings could provide:	How this might look:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of resources based on the groups interest and needs</li> <li>• Sharing of research relevant to the field with group discussion</li> <li>• Opportunities for peer case review and support with challenging cases</li> <li>• Opportunities to learn ways to strengthen advocacy and team building skills</li> <li>• Guest speakers on topics related to addressing secondary traumatic stress, court support, working collaboratively with court and community advocates, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocates share different sexual development charts they use to educate parents and discuss important elements needed</li> <li>• An advocate asks to share a difficult case with the group to get feedback and support (removing identifying info)</li> <li>• Advocates share with the group some of the best things they have learned from recent trainings they attended</li> <li>• Advocates share out a recent research article and spend the group time processing and discussing the information and how it applies to their work</li> </ul>

## Guidance to Set Up and Run Your Cohort Effectively

### 1. Define Cohort Objectives

Clearly articulate the objectives and purpose of the Peer Learning Cohort. Ensure that all participants understand the primary goals, which may include:

- Sharing best practices and lessons learned
- Problem-solving and addressing challenges
- Strengthening leadership skills
- Building a supportive network

- Fostering collaboration and partnership opportunities
- Empower participants to seek alternative solutions through asking powerful questions

## 2. Select Participants

Provide a brief registration survey or RSVP email to learn more about the individuals who want to participate. This can provide you with information about the backgrounds of applicants and can inform how you design and facilitate the groups. From the list of applicants, determine if all applicants will be in one cohort or multiple. Aim for a group size that allows for meaningful interactions while maintaining manageable discussions (around 8-12 participants is ideal). If you have multiple cohorts, carefully assign cohort participants to ensure diversity in terms of organizational size, focus area, and expertise. Strive for a mix of experienced and emerging members.

As you review applicants, consider if certain member characteristics might impact the feeling of support and confidentiality. For example, should the group include participants who are supervisors of others in the group? Would that make those members feel they could not share as freely? A possible solution, if there are enough participants, could be to have different groups. A cohort could be set up for supervisors and managers. Feel empowered to establish boundaries to participation in order to support the established objectives of your Peer Learning Cohorts.

Some suggested fields to include in a registration form in addition to name and contact information are:

**Please click on the professional discipline with which you identify most closely.** (CAC director, MH clinician, MDT coordinator, etc.)

**Professional Credentials** (Enter the abbreviation. Ex. MSW, MD, JD, SANE)

**How long have you served in your role as ..... \***

**Which best describes the setting of your primary team? \***

- Rural
- Suburban
- Tribal
- Urban

**Peer Learning Cohorts are held quarterly from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Central. Please click on the date(s) you plan to attend.** Check all that apply. \*

- March 10
- June 16
- September 22
- December 8

## 3. Set Cohort Structure

Establish a clear structure for the cohort meetings, including the following details:

- **Frequency:** Decide on the frequency of meetings (e.g., monthly, bi-monthly).
- **Duration:** Determine the length of each meeting (usually 1-2 hours).

- **Venue:** Decide on which platform you want to utilize (Zoom, Teams, etc.).
- **Facilitation:** Assign a facilitator to guide discussions and keep the conversations on track.
- **Scribe:** Assign a scribe if the group would like to capture notes about ideas or resources shared.

#### **4. Create a Safe and Supportive Environment**

Ensure that the cohort is a safe space where participants can openly share their experiences, challenges, and vulnerabilities. Emphasize confidentiality and respect among members, creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual support. You may wish to establish group agreements. Samples are provided in the [Facilitator One-Pager](#).

#### **5. Develop an Agenda Template**

Create a standard agenda template that outlines the flow of each cohort meeting. Beginning with a welcome and check-in can help to create an environment that encourages participants to be present with one another and helps increase engagement from the start. In addition, research shows that having a check-in where everyone speaks increases the likelihood they will speak up later in the meeting. Leave room for flexibility to address emerging issues or topics that participants wish to explore.

Suggested agenda structure:

- Welcome and check-ins
- Knowledge sharing or presentation from one or more participants
- Open discussion on key challenges or topics
- Goal setting and action planning for the next meeting

#### **6. Rotate Leadership Responsibilities**

Encourage participants to take turns in leading discussions, presenting topics, or moderating meetings. This rotation promotes engagement and a sense of shared ownership within the cohort.

#### **7. Leverage External Resources**

Invite guest speakers or subject matter experts occasionally to provide insights on specific topics or challenges faced by nonprofits. These experts can bring valuable perspectives and expertise to the cohort. This is where Chapters may be quite helpful as they may have access to or connections with experts and resources that individual CACs are not aware of, such as statewide networks or organizations.

#### **8. Foster Continued Communication**

Set up a communication channel (e.g., email group, online forum) where cohort participants can continue discussions, seek advice, and upload share resources between meetings.

#### **9. Assess Impact, Reflect and Adapt**

Regularly assess the cohort's progress and impact on participants and their organizations. Gather feedback on the cohort's effectiveness and adjust as needed to enhance its value. A Chapter can support this by sending out periodic short surveys and collecting the data.

Periodically reflect on the cohort's activities and outcomes. Use this reflection to adapt and improve the structure, content, and overall experience for future cohorts.

Sample surveys could include capturing the following:

**Rate the following** (Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree):

- I acquired new skills, knowledge, and/or perspectives I can incorporate in my work.
- The time I spent was meaningful.
- I would recommend attending a peer learning cohort group to others.

**How would you improve this experience?** Check all that apply.

- No improvements are needed.
- Provide better information before the meeting (ex. how to access the meeting, technical instructions).
- Offer the session at a different time.
- Increase the time of the meeting.
- Reduce the time of the meeting.

## **10. Celebrate Achievements**

Recognize and celebrate the successes and achievements of cohort members and their organizations. Positive reinforcement can boost morale and further strengthen the cohort's camaraderie.

Remember, a Peer Learning Cohort is a dynamic and evolving community. By fostering a collaborative and supportive environment, you can create a space where CAC staff/MDT members can thrive, learn, and make a lasting impact on their organizations and the communities they serve.

## **Attribution and Disclaimer**

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