



# Supervisor Peer Groups

Insights to Action is a suite of resources meant to help state and local public health agencies improve recruitment and retention by acting on their data from the Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS). Find more tools like this at <http://debeaumont.org/programs/insights-to-action/>.

## What are supervisor peer groups?

Supervisor peer groups are a space for supervisors in your agency to connect with, support, and learn from one another. Groups of supervisors meet on a regular basis to discuss common challenges, management strategy, and other topics that are unique to the supervisory role. If done well, supervisor peer groups can help supervisors at your agency learn and improve.

## Why are supervisor peer groups effective?

Supervisor peer groups allow supervisors to discuss common management challenges and gain the perspective of others. Ideally, groups would contain both new and veteran supervisors, allowing those with more experience to mentor those who are less practiced. When groups of individuals meet regularly over time and support one another through challenges, they can build relationships and mutual trust. Not only do supervisor peer groups benefit the agency by improving supervisory practice of participants, but they can also lead to higher satisfaction and retention among the supervisors themselves.

The Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS), conducted in 2014, 2017, 2021, and 2024, supports the government public health workforce by measuring strengths and gaps to inform future investments in funding, training, recruitment, and retention.

**PHWINS**

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE  
INTERESTS AND NEEDS SURVEY

**Insights to Action** is a suite of resources meant to help state and local public health agencies improve recruitment and retention by acting on their PH WINS data.

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## What resources are needed to organize supervisor peer groups?

At least one staff member is needed to recruit, organize logistics for, and facilitate peer groups. If a group meets monthly, this likely amounts to approximately five hours per month.

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## How do you organize supervisor peer groups?

### Recruitment

When organizing peer groups, the first step is to recruit members, which requires providing potential members with information about what they are signing up for. Below is an example of a blurb you can use to advertise supervisor peer groups via an email to agency supervisors.

*Managing people and teams is hard work. Because we recognize that, [name of agency] is organizing a supervisor peer group for supervisors who are interested in connecting with, supporting, and learning from one another. Every month, this group will meet to discuss common challenges, share real situations, and brainstorm possible solutions. Together, we have the power to improve our supervisory practice and agency culture.*

Once the group starts meeting and members recognize its value, recruitment will likely continue via word of mouth. Supervisor peer groups are best capped at about 15 participants, so if there is more interest than this, holding multiple groups may be beneficial.

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### Facilitation

A facilitator should always be present to set an agenda, keep the conversation productive, and ensure that all participants adhere to the group's ground rules. Suggested ground rules are as follows:

1. **Confidentiality:** Supervisor peer groups are meant to be a safe space. As such, everyone in the group must agree to keep the details of discussions confidential.
  2. **Stay positive:** Supervisor peer groups are not meant to be venting sessions about difficult employees. When discussing challenging situations, all participants are expected to assume the best intentions of their employees and remain positive in their characterization of employees as human beings with room to improve.
  3. **Agree on common goals:** The goal of a supervisor is to support their employees to be successful, and there are many ways to effectively do this. Improving relationships with employees and supervisory practice can ultimately lead to improved workplace culture.
  4. **Welcome other perspectives:** Regardless of tenure, experience, or background, everyone has something to contribute. Be open to perspectives that are different from yours and accept the help of others in determining the best path forward.
  5. **No names:** Do not use the names of colleagues or employees in any peer group discussions.
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## How do you keep participants of supervisor peer groups interested?

### Member Facilitation

Utilizing participants in the planning of each peer group can not only ease the main facilitator's work but also make the content more responsive to their needs. One way to accomplish this would be to allow participants to facilitate different sessions by leading agenda creation, meeting facilitation, and upholding the group's ground rules.

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### Responsive Planning

Even if participants are not interested in leading or planning a session, they can still contribute to the agenda. The facilitator can create a form to crowdsource topics for a particular meeting, or at the end of each meeting, participants can go around and suggest topics for next time. The facilitator can also reserve 10–15 minutes of each meeting for participants to bring up timely questions or concerns.

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### Welcoming New Members

Membership will likely fluctuate over time, with original members rolling off and new members expressing interest and wanting to join. Always welcome new members and start new groups if necessary to keep numbers down. If possible, structure groups so that individuals are meeting with other supervisors who are in different work units, divisions, or offices – this can help prevent the spread of gossip.

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## Sample Agenda – First Meeting

Time	Topic
20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name, position, work unit, and number of people you supervise</li><li>• What do you find most rewarding about being a supervisor? What is most challenging?</li></ul>
10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ground Rules</li></ul>
30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are you looking to get from participating in this group?</li><li>• What makes you nervous about participating in this group?</li><li>• What are some topics you'd like to discuss?</li><li>• What are some ways that participants in this group can work together to improve organizational culture?</li></ul>

## Sample Agenda – Subsequent Meetings

Time	Topic
10 minutes	<b>New member introductions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name, position, work unit, and number of people you supervise</li><li>• What do you find most rewarding about being a supervisor? What is most challenging?</li></ul>
30 minutes	<b>Discussion topic: [insert topic here]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you find easy about [topic]? What's difficult?</li><li>• What are some strategies you use in this area?</li><li>• Is there a situation in the past related to [topic] that you wished you would have handled differently? What was the situation, and what do you wish you did differently?</li><li>• Tell us about a time you learned something about [topic]. What did you learn, and how did you learn it?</li><li>• Is anyone struggling with something related to [topic] that they'd like to share, and have the group weigh in on?</li></ul>
15 minutes	<b>Timely questions and concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there a question about supervision that has come up for you in the past month?</li><li>• Is there a situation you're struggling with, that you'd like the group to weigh in on?</li></ul>