

# Thinking about what it might cost to run a peer support network

## Introduction

It is important to consider what funds are required to run a peer support network and how this can be sourced. There are two main types of costs in running a peer support group:

1. The variable costs of running each meeting; and
2. The fixed costs of having a peer support network established.

Variable costs are the costs that are spent, and change, with each peer support network meeting such as: room booking fees, tea and coffee, catering, any staff delivery fees, any transport costs and any information collection or delivery costs including printing of handouts and alike. Fixed costs are the costs that do not change no matter how many peer support network meetings are held and include things like: insurance, infrastructure costs, computers/projectors or other IT, accounting fees and any rent costs if you have a central office or use part of one. Both costs should be considered and sources of funding for them identified.

## Let's make it happen

There are a range of considerations when considering peer support network running costs:

1. ***What will the structure of your peer support network be?*** Will it fit within an existing organisation? If so, what assistance can they provide to cover the costs of group delivery? Can they provide you with any required insurance cover, and provide the required staff and/or volunteer management and support? If it will be an independent peer support network, how will you ensure you have sufficient funds to cover delivery costs? Are there other like-minded organisations that may be willing to assist you in your peer support network development and delivery?
2. ***Who will deliver and coordinate the group?*** It is important to consider how you you're your group to run and who is best suited to do this task. There are several parts to group delivery including: spreading word about the group, building membership, setting a schedule, booking (and initially finding) accessible and available venues, selecting topics for discussion (and preparing for them), preparing the room, arranging any food and/or drinks, delivering the group and providing any required support to members outside of the peer support network meetings. Do you believe the same person can do all of these? Should they be a paid staff member or a volunteer? If a paid staff member, how will their fee be funded? Are you able to be clear about what aspects of group delivery they are responsible for? If a volunteer(s), how will you provide them with support and any required infrastructure? How will

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you ensure you meet Office for Volunteers guidelines? The costs of group delivery will be significantly impacting by this choice.

3. ***What insurance cover is required?*** It is important to ensure the core activity of the group is covered. For example, many locations require you to provide an insurance cover letter to hire a room to ensure everyone is covered for injury. Can you be sure any group leader(s) is either covered for advice provided, or else knows to give standard and non-specific advice?
4. ***What does it cost to provide good, timely peer support network meeting information?*** it is important to ensure all members know what network meetings are being held. There are many low cost ways of doing this – from text messages to emails and online free newsletter packages. But what if some members cannot access the internet, or do not have mobile phones? How will you ensure you are able to communicate with all members and, if this means some need reminders posted, what is this likely to cost and who will do this?
5. ***How can you manage the costs?*** Budgeting is very important to ensure you can continue to offer your members a peer support network into the future. Doing a budget involves making estimates of all the likely costs of running the group and managing that budget means you need to regularly compare what you have spent to what you estimated you would spend. The differences are variances and will let you know if you are running 'on budget', 'under budget' or 'over budget'. Knowing this while you are developing your group is very important as no one wants groups to be unsuccessful due to budgetary issues.
6. ***Who can assist you with funding for group establishment?*** There are many opportunities to gain grants and funding to run a peer support network. The four core sources of funding for any community group are:
  - a. Grants: many local and some federal government and other grants are regularly available for application, though you may need an auspicing agency;
  - b. Sponsorship, In-Kind and Other: are there local businesses or organisation to assist?;
  - c. Donations: your members, contacts and even strangers may support your idea; and,
  - d. Fundraising: can you and your members raise the funds from the huge number of opportunities available, from go-fund-me pages to selling Entertainment Books!
7. ***Could having an auspicing agency help make your dream a reality?*** If you dream of establishing a peer support network but cannot work out how to get the funds to do this because you do not meet grant criteria, it may be that you need an auspicing agency. This is an organisation with similar values that is willing to be the official grant applicant and manager on your group's behalf. Look for like-minded organisations (perhaps on the peerconnect website), and start having conversations about your dreams to others.

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8. ***What is your financial literacy level?*** Some people are comfortable managing money while others may lack confidence and/or skills, or simply do not like dealing with money. It is important to consider how much you understand money and how comfortable you are with concepts such as budgets, if you are considering managing the funds side of peer support groups. Remember, you can always make gaining financial literacy one of your own life goals, or that others can often support you with these aspects of group delivery.

Overall, running a peer support network is all about people coming together and sharing.

However, considering how you will facilitate the financial aspects of the network is also important. No matter how close and trusting the members of a peer support network are, having transparent financial systems in place is always essential.

### Where you can find more information

There are lots of online resources about financial literacy, budgeting, funding for community groups and grants.

The **Community Tool Box**, From Kansas in the US, has significant information on gaining financial sustainability, budgeting, financial management and alike. You can read it at this link: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/finances/grants-and-financial-resources/financial-sustainability/main>

The Cancer Council has an online resource which includes a good guide relating to managing groups and how much thought should go into the financial aspects of peer support group establishment at:

[https://canceraustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/peer\\_supports1\\_504af01f596c3.pdf](https://canceraustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/peer_supports1_504af01f596c3.pdf)

**The Centre of Excellence Peer Support** – Mental Health has great resources about Peer Support. There is information about funding and items to consider in the guide available here:

<http://www.peersupportvic.org/index.php/2014-12-15-22-42-49/2014-12-16-02-22-27/Resources/CEPS-Setting-up-a-Peer-Support-Group/>

### Government Grants

There are a range of sites that provide current grant information. You can search online for specific local council and state programs (such as SA's site

<http://www.grantassist.sa.gov.au/community>) and also can go to the federal site:

<https://www.grants.gov.au/> and this will direct you to additional grant opportunities.

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Finally, the NDIA also offer funding opportunities from time to time, and these are managed via the government's community grants hub - <https://www.communitygrants.gov.au/>.

The PeerConnect website is here <http://www.peerconnect.org.au/>

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