

Tips for a Successful Peer Group Application

One size does not fit all. So it is with peer groups. And peer group applications.

The following tips, suggestions, and examples provide guidance for completion of a peer group application. Verbatim directions from the web application are printed in **bold**. Notes, tips, and examples are in regular case. Peer group applicants are encouraged to read the following but, more than that, reflect upon the peer group they want to create and provide thoughtful responses that relate specifically to the proposed group.

General information about VCCS peer groups can be found at:

<https://www.vccs.edu/FacultyStaff/ProfessionalDevelopment/PeerGroups/tabid/420/Default.aspx>.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at nottenritter@vccs.edu. 'best. Nan Ottenritter

Note: Applications are automatically “time stamped” when they are received in the database to assure accuracy in meeting deadlines.

1. **Name of Proposed Peer Group:**

Note: Names should be short, concise, descriptive, and inclusive. They will be used in naming the Blackboard organization for the group and in all PR. Some names should employ a slash to more fully explain the group. Two examples are ASL/Interpreter Education and English/ESL. It is not necessary to use “VCCS” or “Peer Group” in the title. The “VCCS” is unnecessary and we will add “Peer Group.”

2. **This application is for which tier?**

Directions: Choose from the following:

- Tier #1 groups are comprised primarily of teaching faculty and receive 70% of available funding for peer groups.
- Tier #2 groups are comprised of personnel not classified as teaching faculty yet associated with student success. They receive 25% of available funding.

3. **Peer Group Description:**

Directions: Provide a brief description of the proposed peer group and the audience intended.

Note:

- Describe “who,” i.e., “VCCS faculty in science disciplines” or “psychology faculty.”
- Include a general description, i.e. “learn from each other and enhance student success.”
- Include more specific reasons for the group, i.e., “keep current with new discipline content, share new techniques to present content, provide networking opportunities.”

This peer group description is an abbreviated form of information found later in the document.

4. **Course Designators:** **Directions:** List the designators of courses of faculty who are to be included in this group, i.e., HMS (human services), PBS (public service) and MEN (mental health) for a purposed human services peer group.
- Note:** This information is important so all full and part-time faculty of these disciplines can be enrolled in the group's Blackboard site, if so requested by the group's leader.
5. **Is this group affiliated with a national or state organization?** **Note:** Affiliation with a national organization often demonstrates a high degree of sustainability.
6. **Name of Organization:** **Note:** Formal name and acronym of the state or national organization is useful here.
7. **URL of Organization:** **Note:** Be accurate here. Professional Development committee members will check this out.
8. **Leader's Name:** **Directions: Peer Group Leader Information**
- Note:** These fields contain information of the proposed peer group leader. The Office of Professional Development (OPD) will communicate with this person only. This person is then expected to communicate with the rest of the peer group and may do so through the many mechanisms on the group's Blackboard site – email, announcements, discussion boards, etc. Completion of all the following fields is **required** (*) so we can reach the leader by snail or electronic mail or phone.

*Leader's Title:

*Leader's College:

*Leader's Email:

*Leader's Work Phone:

*Leader's Campus Mailing Address:

Street _____

City _____

State ____ Zip _____

Other Planning Member(s) contact information:

Name _____

Email _____

9. **Directions: Do you certify a minimum of 12 or more VCCS employees are interested in becoming a member of this peer group?**

Note: Respond “yes” or “no” here. This minimum number comes from the basic peer group definition.

10. **Directions: Describe the purpose of the proposed peer group. At the end of the description, put the percentages of the proposed different foci of meetings and work. (Please limit to 100 words or 1,000 characters.)**

Note: It’s important to be intentional about the peer group. What are the purpose(s) of the peer group? They can be many, i.e., updating curricula, discussing dealing with difficult students, deciding on common system-wide curricula, discussing best practices, discussing new trends in integrating technology into teaching the discipline. When groups start planning their meetings they should keep the overall purpose in mind as well as the purpose(s) for the specific meeting. The next section organizes all possible reasons into three categories. See below.

Percentages of the proposed different foci of meetings and work: (Must equal 100%)

Note: The VCCS peer group program was created specifically to meet the needs of teaching faculty. Those could be categorized in these three basic areas: 10.a) information/discussions related to research and issues within the discipline, 10.b) information/discussions relating to teaching pedagogy, and 10.c) information/discussions related to career advancement in the field (both for students as well as faculty themselves). Applicants are to review the list of purposes above and then approximate the percentage of the peer group’s work allocated to each. There is also an “other” option in which peer groups can include a purpose not described here but important to the life of the group. The “other” should be explained in the field below that option. ALL percentages should total 100.

- | | | |
|------|--|-------------------------|
| 10.a | Information/discussions related to research and issues within the discipline: | Insert percentage here. |
| 10.b | Information/discussions related to teaching pedagogy: | Insert percentage here. |
| 10.c | Information/discussions related to career advancement in the field: | Insert percentage here. |
| 10.d | Other: | Insert percentage here. |

Total = 100%

If Other, please explain:

11. **Directions: Will the peer group serve a significant number of VCCS community colleges, or will it support important *existing or emerging academic programs* that might not demonstrate high number of students, but are important to the VCCS?**

Note: This question is designed to highlight the importance of the program to VCCS colleges and programs of study – either through serving a significant number of our colleges or programs of importance to the VCCS. Regardless of the choice, compelling data should be provided to support the answer. Respond “yes” or “no.”

An example for the first category, a significant number of VCCS community colleges, might be Math or developmental studies. An example of the second category, important existing or emerging academic programs that might not demonstrate high numbers of students, might be “green” programs that come about as a result of the governor’s focus on economic development through stimulation of “green” jobs and curricula. An example for this category might be Energy Technology (ENE) or Modeling and Simulation (SIM).

12. **Directions: Justify your answer to 11 in 100 words or less, 1,000 characters.**

Note: Data can be gleaned from the *VCCS Online* database in which the number of colleges supporting programs or courses is described. It can be gleaned from querying prospective peer group members through the proposed peer group’s Blackboard site. It can be gleaned from past attendance at peer group meetings. For the “green” initiative mentioned above one might cite the Governor’s Executive Orders 48 and 82 regarding sustainability efforts and green jobs. Regardless of the source, the justification should be evidence-based.

13. **Directions: Will the peer group serve a significant number of VCCS full-time or part-time personnel associated with teaching and learning, or will it support personnel involved in important existing or emerging academic programs that might not demonstrate high numbers of students, but are important to the VCCS?**

Note: This question is designed to highlight the importance of the program to VCCS personnel associated with teaching and learning. The primary audience is teaching faculty, however, those associated with student success can also apply as a tier #2 peer group. Regardless of the choice, compelling data should be provided to support the answer. Respond “yes” or “no.”

An example of the first category, a significant number of VCCS full-time or part-time personnel associated with teaching and learning, might be Developmental and General Education disciplines such as English, Math, history, etc. An example of the second category, personnel involved in important existing or emerging academic programs that might not demonstrate high numbers of students, but are important to the VCCS, might be any of the emerging new “green” programs mentioned above.

14. **Directions: Justify your answer in 100 words or less, 1,000 characters.**

Note: Data can be gleaned from from querying prospective peer group members through the proposed peer group’s Blackboard site. It can be gleaned from past attendance at peer group meetings. It might be easier to demonstrate the number of students system-wide in particular programs – this is much easier to track than the number of full-time and adjunct faculty members. This data is located at: http://myfuture.vccs.edu/Research/AKT600_Y0708.pdf, starting on page 100 for system-wide figures. The justification should be evidence-based.

15. **Directions: Identify the desired outcomes (i.e., goals and objectives) of the peer group's work in 100 words or less, 1,000 characters.**

Note: The response to this question should hone the general purpose of the group found in question #2 into specific outcomes. It is better if the outcomes can be measured but the OPD realizes that not all outcomes will be. A general outcome might be to increase networking throughout the system. While that could possibly be measured by collecting data on the number of contacts between attendees post-conference, most would probably agree that data is not worth the effort that would be required to collect it.

On the other hand, if there are specific, measurable goals, they should be stated. For example, early childhood development programs might need to align to state or nationally-mandated standards and OT programs might need to align to business and industry standards. Another group might realize the need to integrate more web 2.0 experiences into their pedagogy and set out to learn specific web 2.0 strategies. Some faculty might need to be trained on new software or hardware that is becoming (or has become) the industry standard – like the latest Autodesk version of AutoCAD. The number of participants in this training is easily quantified. Specify the outcome and how it will be measured.

16. **Directions: Describe how the outcomes of the peer group's activities align with the mission and strategic direction of the VCCS as well as the mission of the Office of Professional Development (OPD) Peer Group Program. (100 words or less, 1,000 characters)**

Note: After the completion of Dateline 2009, there will be another 6-year strategic plan for the VCCS and applicants are encouraged to align peer group goals with that plan. This supports the VCCS moving in a common direction together.

The goals of the VCCS OPD Peer Group program are found in the following description taken from the website: **Peer groups** are specifically targeted to teaching and learning and all that connotes – pedagogy, discipline content and updates and curricula. A peer group can be a discipline-related group, such as English or physics. It can also be a group critical to teaching and learning but not discipline-based such as learning assistance professionals. It is focused on individuals' improving their job performance and effectiveness in the realm of teaching and learning.

17. **Directions: Describe how the desired outcomes will be evaluated. Consider using the four-part rubric of reaction, learning, behavior, and results used by Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen. (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004) *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines*. New York: Longman). (100 words or less, 1,000 characters)**

Note: The four-part rubric listed above is suggested because it is so practical and simple. Suppose the peer group meeting provided education on integration of web 2.0 strategies into teaching practice. Assessing reaction would involve measuring the attendees' satisfaction with and reaction to the learning experiences provided, for example, at the peer group meeting. Assessing learning would measure attendees' learning about the connection between teaching practice and web 2.0 strategies and how to integrate the strategies into their classes. Assessing behavior could include behavioral intent as well as actual changes implemented into the teaching practice of the attendee. Assessing results would, in this case, involve assessing the impact of student success in the course as well as any other impacts identified as outcomes.

This rubric is suggested, not required. It *is* required that the peer group have clearly delineated and understood methods to assess their desired outcomes.

18. **Directions: Describe how the peer group will add value to the system and its constituents in 100 words or less, 1,000 characters.**

Note: The value added is specific to the peer group and its purpose and desired outcomes. It could: contribute to the development of state, industry and national standard-setting, result in a new certificate or diploma program for the commonwealth, promote teaching excellence, provide information on degree programs to those who want to further their career, provide for discipline updates in rapidly changing fields, etc.

19. **Directions: How will the peer group organize itself for sustainability? Describe the processes for designating leaders, communicating with members, program planning, etc. in 100 words or less, 1,000 characters.**

Note: Sustainability involves having clear processes in place for accomplishing work and preparing future leaders. It is hoped that the Blackboard sites, face-to-face and virtual meetings, and other identified mechanisms will assist with this. Sustainability also involves having clear leadership and lines of authority. It is suggested that leaders rotate on a regular basis to give more people an opportunity to develop their leadership skills through working with a state-wide committee. Some groups elect officers yearly to accomplish this. There are clearly other ways in which groups sustain their energy and enthusiasm for what they do. Peer groups are encouraged to come up with ways that might be unique to their particular group.