

VCCS OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Peer Group Manual 1.0

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Part 1: Introduction

- a. Mission of the VCCS Professional Development Program – Teaching and Learning

The origins of the VCCS Professional Development Program lie in providing an array of programs and services focused primarily on teaching and learning. A rubric was developed to provide a framework in which offerings were to be focused on discipline, teaching pedagogy, career, and/or institutional development. IDPs (Individual Development Plans) were developed to facilitate the faculty member's passage through their career.

The realignment of the mission of the VCCS Professional Development program with teaching and learning was discussed and agreed upon at the November 2007 meeting of the Professional Development Committee. Mission creep has occurred in which groups of personnel not directly related to teaching and learning have been served by the department. These include functional workgroups and governance groups. It is now time to assure that these groups, which are important to the VCCS,

yet not directly related to teaching and learning, are served through other mechanisms in the System.

b. Rationale for Clarification of Peer Groups within the VCCS Professional Development Program

For years the VCCS Professional Development Committee, as well as the System, has been grappling with the question, “What, exactly, is a peer group?” In 2007, Caliber consultants completed an assessment of the VCCS Professional Development program. Two recommendations from that assessment relate to the updating of the Peer Group program found in this document.

Recommendation #3: *Clarify the program mission, priorities, and audience(s)*, paying particular attention to new and emerging professional development needs and innovative methods to meet those needs (e.g., distance learning). New or expanded activities will require additional resources

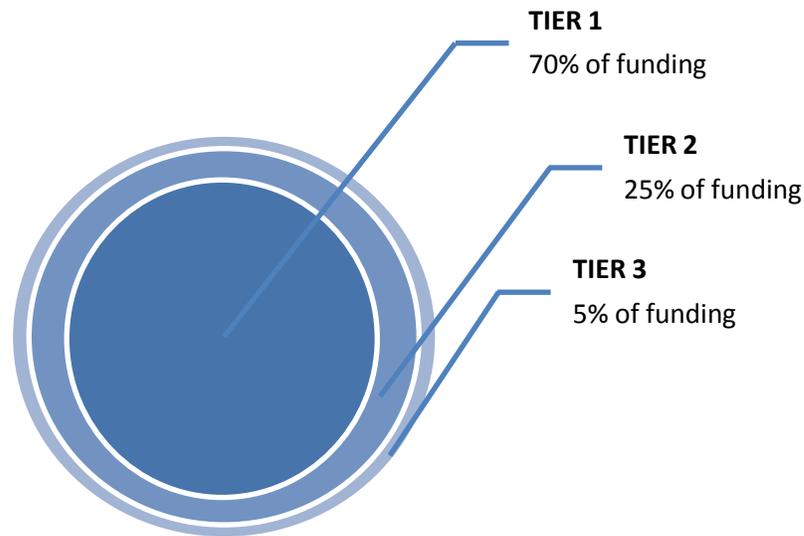
Recommendation #4: Define boundaries for the Office of Professional Development, *delineating activities on which its staff should focus*, activities most appropriately subsumed by other VCCS departments/offices (particularly the VCCS Human Resource Services Department), and activities most appropriately conducted by individual colleges

The phrases in italics above call for a clarification of the mission and audiences of all programming offered by the VCCS Professional Development program. Limited resources also make this clarification and prioritization of professional development work important. This document, however, will focus solely on the clarification of the Peer Group program.

Part 2: New VCCS Peer Group Program

Professional development “happens” in the Virginia Community College System in many different ways, as does the work of the System. One way professional development happens is through the programs offered by the Office of Professional Development. Professional development provided by the VCCS Office of Professional Development focuses on discipline, instructional, career, and organizational development. It is primarily targeted toward faculty and teaching and learning.

A peer group is an association of 12 or more full-time or part-time personnel associated with teaching and learning. A yearly schedule to serve peer groups on a rotating basis will be developed based upon tier status and available resources for the year. Tier #1 groups will receive 70% of available funding, tier #2 groups will receive 25% and 5% of funding will be designated for discretionary use by the OPD. Information about the tier system can be found later in this document.



The objective of the peer group meeting is to encourage intra/interdisciplinary collaboration, creativity, problem solving, planning, forecasting, learning and networking in the Virginia Community College System. Faculty meet to discuss substantive issues related to discipline updates, curriculum revision, integration of technology and instructional innovations.

Each peer group face-to-face meeting will be based on tier determination and availability of resources. Because professional development is a 3-legged stool supported by the individual, the college, and the System, colleges are encouraged to match System Office support when possible. This is particularly important to partially-funded, face-to-face meetings.

Peer group meetings are organized by a planning committee comprised of individuals familiar with/appointed by those in the field. A peer group planning committee needs to be representative of the discipline as a whole. At times a peer group may be asked to meet with other groups, but will retain its own programming and can share some joint programming if it wishes. In this case, the program would be akin to a “track” in a larger “mega-group” meeting.

Peer groups do have other ways to connect and work throughout the year. These include: 1) a Blackboard site (to be managed by the group), 2) using Elluminate, Breeze, or other virtual meeting tools, 3) sharing documents through a program like Google Applications, or 4) other ways to be determined.

Some definitions relating to peer and workgroups will be helpful at this point.

As stated above, a peer group is an association of 12 or more full-time or part-time personnel associated with teaching and learning. Within the VCCS there are peer, work, and governance groups. The definitions below will clarify which groups are able to apply for peer group status.

- **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 math. It can also be a group critical to teaching and learning but not discipline-based. It is focused on individuals' improving their job performance and effectiveness in the realm of teaching and learning. There are two tiers of peer groups which are explained in the next section.
- **Work groups** focus on specific topics important to the support of teaching and learning but not directly related to it. The focus is on improving the on-going, daily effectiveness of the college's business practices. This includes groups such as the Admissions and Records Workgroup and the Financial Aid Workgroup.
- **Governance groups** concern themselves with policy and processes that support teaching and learning but are, again, not directly related to it. Governance groups include CODD (Council of Deans and Directors), ASAC (Academic and Student Affairs Council) and ACOP (Advisory Council of Presidents).

A bi-yearly schedule to serve peer groups on a rotating basis will be developed based upon tier status and available resources for the year:

- 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.
- Five percent of available funding is marked for use at the discretion of the Office of Professional Development (OPD).

Attendees of regular technology training updates and workgroup and governance group meetings not directly related to teaching and learning, although important, are not intended audiences for the peer group program.

Part 3: Peer Group Criteria

Applicants will apply online to become a peer group within the VCCS. Approvals last for six years, at which point the peer group may reapply. Criteria are as follows:

1. The purpose of the proposed peer group is directly related to discipline content, teaching pedagogy and/or career advancement in the field.

2. The peer group will serve a significant number of VCCS community colleges or will support important existing or emerging academic programs that might not demonstrate high numbers of students, but are important to the VCCS.
3. The peer group will serve a significant number of VCCS full-time or part-time personnel associated with teaching and learning or will support personnel involved in important existing or emerging academic programs that might not demonstrate high numbers, but are important to the VCCS.
4. The peer group clearly states its outcomes.
5. The stated desired outcomes of the peer group's activities align with the mission and strategic directions of the VCCS as well as the mission of the Office of Professional Development (OPD) Peer Group Program.
6. The desired outcomes are evaluated in a robust manner that looks at the four process levels of professional development evaluation: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004) *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines*. New York: Longman).
7. The peer group adds value to the system and its constituents.
8. The peer group will organize itself for sustainability and be able to describe those processes.

Part 4: Peer Group Application Process

1. Volunteers for the Peer Group Planning Group submit online application found at <http://www.vccs.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=691>.
2. The Office of Professional Development (OPD) establishes a Blackboard organization to help each planning group carry out their work. First applicants will be designated as course builders (along with the Director of Professional Development) and will take over the management of the group. The Office of Professional Development will enroll applicants in the group as they come in through the PD website.
3. The planning group submits a completed online application found at the VCCS Professional Development Web site at <http://www.vccs.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=691>
4. The application will then be submitted to the Conference Subcommittee of the VCCS Professional Development Committee (PDC), which will review it.

After review and discussion, the Conference Subcommittee will bring its recommendation to the Professional Development Committee, who, as a group, will approve or deny the application. The PDC will also rank the applicants within the two tiers. Resources for peer groups will be allocated based upon the amount available in the OPD budget.

5. Selected peer groups will then be notified by the OPD. Peer group approval meetings will take place twice a year for implementation the next semester (if funding is available) or the next fiscal year.
6. Peer group applicants denied peer group status may revise and resubmit their application one additional time. They will be given the reasons for the initial denial of the application and ranking within the tier.

Part 5: Peer Group Application Cycles

Peer Group Meeting Period	Funding	Submission Process	Approval Period
Fall 2009 – Fall 2015	Allocation is based on available resources and PDC determination of tier and rank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By February 1, 2009 potential peer groups submit applications. • By May 1, 2009 peer groups are notified. • First possible meeting period – Oct. to Nov. 2009. 	Class of Fall 2015 (Fall 2009 – Fall 2015)
Spring 2010 – Spring 2016	Allocation is based on available resources and PDC determination of tier and rank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By August 1 2009, potential peer groups submit applications. • By October 1, 2009 peer groups are notified. • First possible meeting period – February to April 2010. 	Class of Spring 2016 (Spring 2010 – Spring 2016)
Fall 2010 – Fall 2016	Allocation is based on available resources and PDC determination of tier and rank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By February 1, 2010, potential peer groups submit applications. • By May 1, 2010 peer 	Class of Fall 2016 (Fall 2010 – Fall 2016)

		<p>groups are notified.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First possible meeting period – Oct. to Nov. 2010. 	
Spring 2011 – Spring 2017	Allocation is based on available resources and PDC determination of tier and rank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By August 1, 2010, potential peer groups submit applications. • By October 1, 2010 peer groups are notified. • First possible meeting period – February to April 2011. 	Class of Spring 2017 (Spring 2011 – Spring 2017)
Fall 2011 – Fall 2017	Allocation is based on available resources and PDC determination of tier and rank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By February 1, 2011, potential peer groups submit applications. • By May 1, 2011 peer groups are notified. • First possible meeting period – Oct. to Nov. 2011. 	Class of Fall 2017 (Fall 2011 – Fall 2017)
Spring 2012 – Spring 2018	Allocation is based on available resources and PDC determination of tier and rank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By August 1, 2011, potential peer groups submit applications. • By October 1, 2011 peer groups are notified. • First possible meeting period – February to April 2012. 	Class of Spring 2018 (Spring 2012 – Spring 2018)

Part 6: Responsibilities

a. Peer Group and Peer Group Planning Committee

1. Peer group leaders should provide the OPD will the course designators (if discipline-related group) and position titles (if non-discipline-related group) so that info can be included in all PR and descriptions of peer groups. If desired, faculty teaching those designated courses also can be enrolled in the Blackboard site upon specific request to the Director of Professional Development.

2. Any change in peer group leadership (from the person listed on the peer group application) should be communicated to the OPD immediately.
3. Peer groups are encouraged to include at least one concurrent session for adjuncts to meet and discuss/learn about issues particular to adjuncts teaching in the field.
4. Some peer groups may be composed of several sub-disciplines. The Science Peer Group is a perfect example with sub-disciplines such as chemistry, physics, biology, etc. Peer group planning committees shall be composed of representatives of all of the sub-disciplines and can even consider providing a “track” of specific programming in the larger peer group meeting.
5. Peer group planning committees should base programming on a pre- and post-assessment of faculty needs. (Groups are encouraged to use a system-wide available tool such as WebSurveyor, Google Applications, or a tool of their choice. Note: Every VCCS college has rights to use WebSurveyor and a designated “point person” exists on each campus. Contact the college’s IT department for more information.) Each peer group should distribute a **pre-event survey** that will help the planning committee design the peer conference with attendees’ needs in mind. The instrument should be sent to potential attendees at least six months prior to a meeting. This instrument will ask attendees to:
 - 1) state the percentage of the conference that should focus on:
 - a) pedagogy
 - b) research and issues within the discipline(s),
 - c) technology,
 - d) career advancement and leadership in the field, and
 - e) personal renewal, and
 - 2) list specific topics they would like to see covered in each of these areas.

Prior to sending the survey to potential attendees, the peer group should send a copy of the survey to the OPD which will then share it with the PDC conference subcommittee. The OPD will return the survey to the planners for implementation. A template for a pre-event survey is available at the end of this document. After administering the survey and reviewing the responses, the planning committee should develop a theme and goals for the meeting.

6. The **post-event survey** should be sent to all attendees after each peer group meeting and results reported to the OPD which will share them with the PD conference subcommittee.

7. The peer group is to design their own agenda following the standard peer group meeting format provided in another part of this document.
8. Peer groups are to manage their own call for proposals process for their meetings. They make take advantage of an OPD online submission process if they wish. For more information about this, contact the Professional Development Program Specialist.
9. Peer Groups are to publicize their meetings through their Blackboard site, i.e. sending emails from the site, posting documents, etc. Some peer groups establish their own web site. This, of course, is optional.
10. Peer groups are encouraged to affiliate with other state and national organizations, if applicable.

b. Office of Professional Development

1. The OPD will establish and maintain a Blackboard site for the group.
2. The OPD will secure hotel/college space for lodging and meetings based upon the peer group's meeting date and locations, expected numbers of attendees and program. At times activities might be planned on college campuses, i.e. using computer labs, science labs. Peer group planners are to initiate contact with the colleges to secure sites. The OPD will finalize arrangements with these sites.
3. The OPD will make every effort to have peer groups that wish to, meet together at the same time and place, if possible.
4. The OPD will post the peer group meeting schedule on the web site and disseminate information about peer group meetings through selected email distribution lists.
5. The OPD will provide limited support for keynote speakers. The planning committee should work closely with the OPD on this.
6. The OPD, in collaboration with planning group members, will set up an online registration site for the meeting and manage the registration process.
7. The OPD will produce an agenda for dissemination at peer group meetings, if provided with that document one month prior to the meeting. This should be requested by the peer group.
8. The OPD will provide a participant list and name badges for dissemination at the meeting. It will be based upon the persons completing the online registration process two weeks prior to the meeting.

c. Peer Group Attendees

1. Attendees will contribute to the meeting by:
 - completing pre and post assessments of faculty needs and evaluation of the meeting.
 - submitting proposed sessions through the planning group's designated call for proposals process,
 - providing input to the planning committee,
2. Making and guaranteeing their hotel reservations.
3. Attending and fully participating in the meeting.
4. Contributing to other initiatives and projects undertaken by the peer group.

Part 7: Vendors

The decision of whether to have vendors present at a peer group meeting is left up to the peer group planning committee.

The advantages include informing participants of available materials and teaching aids and generating revenue for the meeting (usual vendor costs are \$350 for a noon-to-noon meeting). The committee may choose to request additional support in the form of door prizes, giveaways or support of ancillary events such as a reception, but this is in addition to the vendor fee, not in lieu of it.

A disadvantage is that it requires additional time and energy from the planning committee to recruit and arrange for and coordinate the details:

- Each vendor must complete a registration form, to be returned with payment two weeks prior to the meeting.
- The hotel must be instructed to provide each with (at minimum) a draped six foot table with chair(s) with power and Internet connections.
- To help maximize their investment, vendors should be placed in a high traffic area and have their sponsorship promoted in communications with meeting participants.

Part 8: Standard Peer Group Meeting Format

First Day

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon
Conference Registration

12:00 noon – 1:15 p.m.
Opening Luncheon with Keynote Speaker (if applicable)

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Afternoon Refreshment Break & Hotel Check-In

3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

4:15 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

Dinner on Own

Second Day

7:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.
Buffet Breakfast with Keynote Speaker (if applicable)

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Concurrent Sessions

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
Morning Refreshment Break & Hotel Check-Out

10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Concurrent Sessions

11:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
Wrap Up

12:15 p.m.
Conference adjourns

Part 9: Timelines

a. General information:

1. Class of Fall 2015 approved peer groups *may* begin meeting in Fall 2009, although they are encouraged to follow their traditional meeting schedule. For example, if a peer group prefers to meet every other year and just met in Fall of 2008, they might want to meet in Fall of 2010 even though they are approved starting Fall of 2009. Most groups will be asked to meet face-to-face very other year unless a compelling need is demonstrated.

2. The tenure of the Fall 2015 peer group will end in Fall of 2015. If interested in another six-year cycle, the group should apply by Feb. 1, 2015.

b. Meeting timelines for Peer Group Meeting Planners:

1. At the peer group meeting, a half-hour “wrap up” time will occur right before participants depart. This provides a chance for the entire group to participate in a plenary session in which they may: 1) elect new leaders to plan and execute the next peer group meeting and serve as “point persons” for communications with the OPD, 2) reflect upon learnings from the current peer group meeting and how those learnings may help in the planning of the next meeting, and 3) actually begin planning for the next peer group meeting.
2. Seven months or more prior to the meeting:
 - Recruit members for the planning committee. Recommended: Set up a subgroup within the Blackboard organization to accomplish planning work.
 - Set dates, locations, hotel needs (set up, number of rooms needed for breakout sessions, AV equipment needed, etc.), and expected numbers of attendees of next peer group meeting with the OPD.
 - Decide if vendors will be recruited for the meeting. If so, design recruitment strategy. Visit our website for a sample Vendor Registration Form.
 - Submit pre-event survey to the OPD for PDC review.
 - Launch reviewed pre-event survey.
3. Six months prior to the meeting:
 - Send results of pre-event survey to OPD and distribute to planning committee.
 - Launch general PR about the meeting, i.e. hold-the-date-emails, etc.
 - Launch call for proposals (using own process or OPD process).
 - Decide on keynote speaker and method of funding, if applicable. Keynoters can be VCCS personnel speaking on matters important to the VCCS or discipline experts.
4. Four months prior to the meeting
 - OPD launches online registration site (with automatic response giving meeting details sent to attendee upon completion of the registration).
5. One month prior to the meeting
 - Send agenda to the OPD to reproduce for the meeting
 - Encourage all potential participants to register by two weeks prior to the meeting so they may have a name badge and be included in the participant list.
 - Attend a conference call with OPD and designated planning committee representatives to review plan and iron out details.

6. Two weeks prior to the meeting
 - The OPD produces a participant list from online registration database.
7. At the meeting
 - OPD provides one staff member to assist with technical set-up, assist with registration, and provide onsite assistance.
 - Peer group provides additional personnel as necessary to help with the registration desk – note that all participants must sign in as they receive their meeting materials.
8. After the meeting
 - Launch post-event survey, compile results, and share with planning committee and OPD.
 - Inform OPD of any changes in leadership and plans for the next peer group meeting.
 - The OPD reviews the hotel bill and provides payment up to the allowable limit.

Part 10: Resources/Technical Assistance

All of the information needed to apply to become a peer group is found by [clicking here](#).

If you have questions or need assistance, please consult with:

- a. Your college's Professional Development Committee (PDC) Representative. The list can be found by [clicking here](#).
- b. The Director of Professional Development, Nan Ottenritter at nottenritter@vccs.edu.
- c. The Professional Development Program Specialist, Nancy Harris, at nharris@vccs.edu.

Part 11: Pre-event Survey Template

Dear <insert name here> peer group member:

In approximately nine months, you peer group will have a face-to-face meeting. Your completion and submission of the pre-event survey will help the planning committee design a program that has you saying “wow” as you leave. Help us increase the “wow” factor of your peer group meeting by completing the following:

1. Name
2. Email address
3. Phone
4. College (pull down menu)
5. Current position (pull down menu)

6. Discipline or academic area
7. Indicate on the matrix below the percentage of peer group programming you would like to see in the following categories of teaching pedagogy, research, current issues, technology, career advancement and leadership, and personal renewal. Then list suggestions for concurrent session in the topics column.

	Percent of the meeting focused on topic to the left. (This should add up to be 100%)	Topics you would like to see relating to the topic to the left.
Teaching pedagogy		
Research in the field		
Current issues in the field		
Technology used in teaching or accomplishing you work		
Career advancement/leadership		
Personal renewal		
Total:		

8. Are there any other topics you would like to see covered at this meeting that you did not include above?
9. Are you interested in being on the planning committee for this conference?
10. Are you able to present a concurrent session? Topic?
11. Are you willing to assist with the meeting in any way? If so, indicate here:
12. What has been your favorite aspect of past peer group meetings?

Thank you for your interest in the VCCCS Peer Group Program.
 It is your passion and commitment to teaching and learning that makes the VCCS Peer Group Program a success.