



Roles and Activities for Lived Experience Advisors in Suicide Prevention Efforts

Engaging individuals with suicide-centered [lived experience](#) in suicide prevention efforts can contribute to positive messaging, enriched programming, enhanced safety, and the destigmatization of suicide.

This document is intended to serve as a guide for individuals with suicide-centered lived experience who engage, or plan to engage, as lived-experience advisors (LE advisors) in suicide prevention activities. It can also be useful to organizations and groups that engage, or plan to engage, LE advisors in their suicide prevention work. Understanding the many ways LE advisors can provide expertise in suicide prevention projects can help LE advisors and potential advisors find roles and activities that best fit their capacities, desires, and needs. It can also help groups and organizations engage LE advisors in ways that improve the effectiveness of their prevention efforts while taking the well-being of the LE advisors into account.

While this document focuses on roles and activities for LE advisors, SPRC's [Levels of Lived Experience Engagement in Suicide Prevention Projects](#) provides information about high, medium, and low levels of LE advisor engagement for organizations that engage, or plan to engage, LE advisors in their suicide prevention work. Organizations and groups may want to consult that document as well as this one as they seek to make informed decisions about meaningfully incorporating lived experience perspectives in their suicide prevention work.

There are multiple ways individuals with lived experience can engage with suicide prevention efforts. Before deciding what roles or activities to take on, it is a good idea for potential LE advisors to first consider their readiness, personal boundaries, well-being needs, and capacities (time, energy, skills, etc.). By identifying their needs and boundaries, LE advisors can better communicate with organizations to find roles and activities that fit their strengths while centering their needs. When LE advisors understand their own needs and organizations share clear information about what roles and activities are available, LE advisors can make informed decisions about engaging with suicide prevention efforts.

LE advisors may take on roles or engage in activities in areas such as research, resource development and delivery, implementation, evaluation, advocacy, activism, education, or awareness.

Research – LE advisors may participate in scholarly research, especially through methodologies like autoethnography that allow them to use their expertise to drive scholarly conversations. LE advisors may also participate in review panels that can inform the direction of research and ensure research activities are trauma-informed and person-centered. Additionally, LE advisors may support data evaluation and interpretation by contextualizing the experiences reflected in the data to add more nuance to data interpretation, a process sometimes called “narrative framing.”

Resources – LE advisors can use their experience and knowledge of suicide prevention, mental health, and health care systems to identify gaps in resources. This can help groups and organizations work with providers to create stronger and more accessible supports for people who may be at risk for suicide. When LE advisors share their experiences, providers can see resources from the perspective of a person using the resource, helping them identify areas for improvement.

Implementation – LE advisors can support or lead the implementation of suicide prevention activities by delivering direct services, such as crisis counseling, peer support, or program assessment. LE advisors can also help identify settings where services could be beneficial and assist in tailoring services to community needs. They can play a role throughout the process of implementing suicide prevention efforts, including in tool development, dissemination, evaluation, or promotion. Drawing on their lived experience, LE advisors can provide practical tips and strategies for implementation that lead to real-world success.

Advocacy – LE advisors who are ready and willing to share their personal narrative testimony can support suicide prevention systems and change by sharing their real-life experiences. Ideally, LE advisors will be sure their testimony includes recommendations for creating or improving resources and services at the organizational, community, or systems level.

Activism – LE advisors may work to challenge political or social systems by articulating gaps that cause social harm and advocating for change to address these gaps. Activism should include recommendations and practical solutions to address issues at scale and across populations.



Education – LE advisors can support suicide prevention-related education by co-creating, co-producing, leading, or supporting trainings and educational materials. This could include curricula creation, delivery, implementation, evaluation, refinement, and promotion.

Awareness – Organizations often engage LE advisors in awareness activities that include storytelling, campaign promotion, or public speaking. Any awareness activity that involves personal storytelling should be trauma-informed for both audiences and the individual who shares. Awareness is important, but when LE advisors participate through storytelling or other kinds of public speaking it is especially important that groups and organizations use best practices for engaging people with lived experience in suicide prevention work.

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