



Starting a Lived Experience Advisory Group: An Introduction for Organizations

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)'s Lived Experience Initiatives (LEI) centers the perspectives of those with suicide-centered lived-living experience in all aspects of our work. Seeking out and meaningfully engaging lived-living experience perspectives in all SPRC products and services allows those who may not have seen themselves represented in suicide prevention efforts to have a significant role in shaping SPRC's work.¹

When groups and organizations meaningfully engage people with lived-living experience in every phase of suicide prevention efforts, the resulting practices, services, or strategies are more likely to be effective in producing positive outcomes.² Incorporating lived-living experience perspectives in suicide prevention efforts can also help groups and organizations identify gaps in health care systems and barriers to care. Centering lived-living experience isn't a fad; it's the future of effective suicide prevention.

To center the expertise of those with lived-living experience of suicide, organizations, groups, and professionals must engage those with lived-living experience early and often to ensure their perspectives guide prevention efforts and activities. Incorporating the unique knowledge of those who have lived through suicide-related experiences can add a valuable dimension to prevention efforts. It can also help ensure that the people who would be served by these efforts are central to their creation and implementation. Creating a group of lived-living experience advisors who are included in all services, policies, and practices is one impactful and measurable approach to centering lived-living experience.

Who Are Lived-Living Experience Advisors?

Lived-living experience advisors are individuals with personal knowledge of suicide gained through direct, first-hand experience. This includes people who have or are currently experiencing thoughts of suicide, survived one or more suicide attempts, lost a loved one to suicide, or provided substantial support to a person with direct experience of suicide.

Lived-living experience advisors' roles in suicide prevention efforts can include leading, co-designing, influencing, and reviewing policies, products, and services.³ Emerging practice in the field of suicide prevention indicates that including individuals with lived experience in co-creating suicide prevention efforts can contribute to reducing the stigma surrounding suicide and support the creation of effective prevention efforts. Each advisor will bring different expertise, different lived experience, and different personal and professional backgrounds; no single advisor can ever fully represent all lived-living experience perspectives.⁴

Considerations for Developing a Lived Experience Advisory Group

Effectively engaging lived-living experience advisors begins at the idea-generation stage of any project, product, service, or effort. Engagement should happen before work on a product or service even starts.

If your group or organization is interested in developing a lived experience advisory group, here are a few things to consider:

- What role will advisors have in your group or organization's efforts?
- Consider your goals as a group or organization. What do you envision the advisor's role will be in helping you reach these goals?
- Will you need advisors to share their personal lived experience? If so, how will their stories be used and how critical is it to your group or organization's success?

Effective Engagement Strategies at a Glance

Determine the purpose of the advisory group and define what engagement looks like in your group or organization.

- Define advisors' roles and responsibilities in your group or organization.
- Determine when and how often advisors will be engaged.
- If advisors are expected to share their lived experience(s), communicate this expectation during onboarding and obtain informed consent each time an advisor is expected to disclose.



- Build processes around how your group or organization will receive and implement advisor feedback.
 - Iterative feedback process: continuous and adaptive
 - Static: one-time, fixed

Inform potential advisors about your group or organization.

- Explain your group or organization's mission and scope. Be transparent about any limitations on how lived experience input is incorporated.
- Use clear language and define acronyms.
- Explain specialized concepts such as, “meaningful engagement,” and “centering perspectives” and describe how your group or organization would implement these concepts.
- Determine how advisors will be recognized for their work (e.g., financial compensation, acknowledgment by name in products, etc.).

Include relationship management strategies in your advisory group design and develop strategies to build trust and foster stronger relationships.

- Ensure safety in your group by providing guidelines addressing mutual respect and conflict management.
- Provide advisors with examples of instances in which their influence steered a decision. Show advisors how their feedback was incorporated into a resource.
- Develop engagement strategies that are responsive to the individual needs and circumstances (i.e., schedules, accessibility needs) of your advisors.
- Be clear about expectations for advisors and provide them with as much information up front as possible.
- Consistently evaluate advisors' experiences in your advisory group to improve engagement strategies.



Next Steps for Success

Once you have built the foundation for your advisory group, you can determine what additional steps would help your advisory group succeed. Additional steps could include developing strategies for advisor identification, recruitment, onboarding, and engagement, or new approaches to advisory group design, evaluation, and sustainability, resource use and identification, and ethical considerations when engaging lived-experience advisors. Intentional and well-designed partnerships with lived-experience advisors can help your group organization support meaningful and measurable change.

References

- ¹ World Health Organization. (2023). *Meaningful engagement of people with lived experience*. <https://www.who.int/groups/gcm/meaningful-engagement-of-people-with-lived-experience>
- ² Merritt, C. C., Farnworth, M. D., Kennedy, S. S., Abner, G., Wright, J. E., & Merritt, B. (2020). Representation through lived experience: Expanding representative bureaucracy theory. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3672065>
- ³ Advisory Board Centre. (2024). *ABF 101 advisory board best practice framework* (3rd ed.). Retrieved April 2, 2026, from <https://www.advisoryboardcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ABF-101-2022.pdf>
- ⁴ Harris, H., Clarkin, C., Rovet, J., Crawford, A., Johnson, A., Kirvan, A., Gruszecki, S., Wang, S., & Soklaridis, S. (2023). Meaningful engagement through critical reflexivity: Engaging people with lived experience in continuing mental health professional development. *Health Expectations: An International Journal of Public Participation in Health Care and Health Policy*, 26(5), 1793–1798. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13798>

Suggested Citation

Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2026). *Starting a lived experience advisory group: An introduction for organizations*. <https://sprc.org/resources/starting-a-lived-experience-advisory-group-an-introduction-for-organizations>