

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE FRAMEWORK

## *The Healing Power of Relationships: Cultivating Connections in Peer Support*

Grounded in 5 Principles of Organizational Development

IACP Wellness Conference | LightHouse Health and Wellness | Tri-State Peer Support Team

### Introduction

*Police departments are paramilitary organizations shaped by deeply embedded cultures of self-reliance, stoicism, and hierarchy. While these norms serve important operational purposes, they also create meaningful barriers to the open acknowledgment of emotional and psychological distress. Establishing a peer support program, therefore, is not merely a matter of assigning personnel to new roles; it requires deliberate, sustained organizational change.*

*Organizational Development (OD) provides a research-based framework for guiding this type of culture-level transformation. The five principles outlined below — drawn from classical OD theory and applied to law enforcement wellness contexts — define the change architecture necessary to build a peer support program that is trusted, durable, and effective.*

***This document is organized around the three-part model introduced at the IACP Wellness Conference Panel Presentation: Building Relationships, Building Trust, and Building Success. Each OD principle aligns directly with one or more of these foundational themes.***

### At a Glance: The Five Principles

#	OD Principle	Application in Peer Support	Timeframe
01	Whole-System Diagnosis	Culture & climate assessment	12–16 weeks
02	Leadership Alignment	Leadership commitment & modeling	Weeks 4–16
03	Planned & Emergent Change	Phased rollout with feedback loops	Months 4–18
04	Participation & Empowerment	Peer selection, voice & co-creation	Ongoing
05	Sustainability & Learning	Metrics, evaluation & continuous learning	18+ months

## 01

PRINCIPLE

**Whole-System Diagnosis***Building Relationships — Know the organization before changing it*

Organizational Development begins with a comprehensive understanding of the system as a whole before prescribing any intervention. In a policing context, this requires an honest, data-informed assessment of the department's existing culture, prevailing attitudes toward mental health, and the informal power structures that may either support or undermine a peer support program.

**Diagnostic Methods**

- Anonymous culture surveys assessing mental health stigma
- Focus groups conducted across ranks (patrol, supervisors, and command staff)
- Analysis of existing critical incident response data
- Review of EAP utilization rates and usage patterns
- Assessment of prevailing gossip dynamics and informal communication norm

**What to Measure**

- Level of psychological safety surrounding disclosure of distress
- Attitudes toward seeking mental health treatment
- Degree of trust in leadership regarding personal disclosures
- Awareness and understanding of existing wellness resources
- Organizational readiness for adoption of a peer support program

**Connection to IACP Panel Presentation Themes:**

The conference emphasized that Peer Supporters serve as Change Agents — but effective change agents must first understand the terrain. Careful diagnosis identifies where stigma persists, which ranks demonstrate the greatest resistance, and where authentic trust already exists. This insight informs every aspect of program design: who is selected as peer supporters, how training is structured, and where proactive check-ins will have the greatest impact.

## 02

PRINCIPLE

**Leadership Alignment & Modeling***Building Trust — Change requires rank to lead it*

In hierarchical organizations, culture flows from leadership. Officers observe command staff behavior to discern what is truly valued, as opposed to what is merely articulated in policy. If lieutenants, captains, and the chief do not visibly endorse — and personally model — help-seeking behavior, the peer support program risks being perceived as performative rather than authentic.

### **What Leadership Alignment Requires**

- Chiefs and command staff publicly acknowledge the psychological cost of the job
- Senior leaders participate in peer support training and orientations
- Supervisors are trained to conduct proactive check-ins — not just respond to crises
- Leadership commits to consistent, fair application of wellness policies (OIS, LODD, reintegration)
- Command models vulnerability: sharing personal experiences with stress normalizes it for the rank-and-file

### **Policy Infrastructure for Trust**

- Formal Peer Support (Peer Support) policy with clear confidentiality protections
- Officer-Involved Shooting (OIS) mandatory follow-up protocol
- Line of Duty Death (LODD) support and survivor policy
- Self-Disclosure of mental health issue — pathway without career penalty
- Reintegration Policy — structured return after leave for mental health treatment
- Fit for Duty guidelines that are transparent, fair, and consistently applied

### **Connection to IACP Panel Presentation Themes:**

Rich Creamer's principle — "It is not about the friendship and more about the friend" — underscores that trust is personal, not positional. Leaders who show up as genuine friends to their officers, rather than simply as supervisors administering wellness initiatives, cultivate the relational trust that makes disclosure possible. Consistent and impartial policy adjudication — applied to everyone without favoritism — serves as the institutional counterpart to that personal trust.

## **03**

PRINCIPLE

### **Planned & Emergent Change**

*Building Relationships & Success — Marathon, not a sprint*

Classical OD distinguishes between planned change — deliberate interventions designed in advance — and emergent change — adaptations that arise organically as the organization responds to evolving realities. Effective peer support programs require a balance of both. A rigid, fully scripted rollout risks failing to accommodate real departmental dynamics, while a purely organic approach lacks the structure needed to achieve lasting cultural transformation.

Phase	Activities	Timeframe
<b>Foundation</b>	Diagnosis, policy review, leadership alignment, peer supporter selection and training	<i>Months 1–6</i>
<b>Launch</b>	Proactive check-in program introduction, squad bay and patrol car outreach, gossip interruption training, follow-up on 3 defined PTE's	<i>Months 4–10</i>
<b>Normalization</b>	Intra-shift support becomes routine; peer supporters visible at critical incidents; follow-up on 3 additional defined PTEs	<i>Months 8–18</i>
<b>Culture Shift</b>	Officers check in on each other without prompting; stigma measurably reduced; leadership sustains momentum	<i>16–24 months</i>

### Connection to IACP Panel Presentation Themes:

The Real Change Curve presented at the conference illustrates this perfectly: there is a long, flat period of “trying to get people’s attention” before engagement finally spikes when individuals “actually start to care.” Planned change provides structure during that early phase, while emergent change allows the program to adapt when an officer unexpectedly opens up, a critical incident creates a teachable moment, or an informal leader becomes an unlikely champion. The 16–18 month timeline to normalization is not pessimistic — it is a realistic reflection of how organizational change unfolds in practice.

## 04 PRINCIPLE

### Participation & Empowerment

*Building Relationships & Trust — Officers must own it*

The Real Change Curve demonstrates that change begins with a long, flat period of “trying to get attention” before engagement truly rises. Planned change provides structure during this early phase, ensuring consistent effort and messaging. Emergent change allows the program to respond to unexpected officer disclosures, critical incidents that create teachable moments, or informal leaders who become champions. The 16–18 month timeline to normalization reflects realistic, sustainable organizational change, not pessimism.

#### **Participation in Design**

- Officers select (or vote on) their own peer supporters
- Front-line input shapes training content and protocols
- Peer supporters co-author confidentiality agreements and boundaries
- Officers participate in defining the 3 critical incidents that always trigger follow-up
- Feedback loops from users shape program evolution

#### **Empowerment in Practice**

- Peer supporters given protected time and organizational legitimacy
- Proactive check-ins conducted without supervisory oversight or reporting
- "Connection before direction" — peer supporters lead with relationship, not agenda
- Officers have voice in how their own cases are handled post-incident
- Intra-shift support encouraged, normalized, and never penalized

### Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) & Empowerment:

The TIC framework presented at the conference — with its principles of Choice, Collaboration, Peer Support & Mutuality, and Empowerment — is itself an expression of OD Principle 4. Offering officers choice in how they receive support, ensuring transparency in processes, and building on individual strengths rather than pathologizing distress are all participatory, empowering practices that build genuine ownership of the program.

# 05

PRINCIPLE

## Sustainability & Organizational Learning

*Building Success — Measure, adapt, and outlast turnover*

The final—and perhaps most crucial—OD principle is sustainability: ensuring that the program endures through leadership changes, budget fluctuations, political pressures, and the inevitable burnout of its earliest champions. Achieving this requires embedding the program into the organization’s DNA through continuous evaluation, strong institutional memory, and a learning culture that views setbacks not as failures, but as valuable data.

### **Sustainability Mechanisms**

- Annual culture assessments to measure stigma reduction and psychological safety trends
- Succession planning for peer supporter roles — the program cannot rest on a single champion
- Relationships maintained with clinicians, in/outpatient centers, EAP, chaplains, and other peer support teams
- Regular peer supporter debriefs to address secondary traumatic stress and prevent burnout
- Policy review cycle: wellness policies updated based on post-incident analysis and emerging best practices

### **Organizational Learning Practices**

- Post-incident analysis used to improve both peer support response and fair policy adjudication
- Honest, regular evaluation of program effectiveness — not just activity counts but cultural impact
- Cross-department learning: relationships with other peer support teams enable benchmarking
- Peer supporter training refreshed annually with new research, techniques, and case discussions
- Leadership briefings connect program data to command priorities (retention, sick leave, use-of-force incidents)

### Connection to IACP Panel Presentation Themes:

The conference emphasized Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) and honest self-evaluation. In OD terms, these are expressions of the learning organization: a department that uses real data about its own performance to continuously improve, that treats the emotional cost of policing as a legitimate organizational variable to be managed — not a personal failing to be hidden. Pet therapy, chaplain programs, and relationships with other peer support teams are not peripheral luxuries; they are sustainability infrastructure.

## Conclusion: The Change Architecture

Building peer support in a police department is one of the most complex organizational changes in the public sector, asking officers to challenge deeply entrenched norms in a culture where vulnerability has been risky. Organizational Development provides the framework to make this change possible, durable, and humane.

The five principles work together:

- **Diagnosis** identifies the terrain for effective interventions.
- **Leadership alignment** makes new norms credible.
- **Planned and emergent change** balance structure with flexibility.
- **Participation and empowerment** ensure officers own the program.
- **Sustainability and learning** keep it resilient beyond any single leader or budget cycle.

***"It is not about the friendship — and more about the friend."***

— Rich Creamer, LightHouse Health and Wellness

**Organizational change, at its best, is an act of collective care. In law enforcement, that care is the foundation of officer safety, public trust, and departmental resilience. Build the relationships. Build the trust. Build the success.**