

Peer Coaching Circles

For Ongoing Faculty Development

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Peer Coaching Circles (PCC) are small groups of faculty members from a similar career stage who meet regularly to support each other's personal and professional goals. PCCs are a solutions-focused mechanism, offering self-sustaining, ongoing access to targeted faculty development. This model has been used extensively through the National Science Foundation-funded LATTICE Program and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke-funded BRAINS Program.

Peer coaching is distinct from mentoring. We define peer coaching as a focused relationship between individuals of equal status (i.e., similar career stage) who support each other through conversations and relationships that develop in a group setting. In a peer coaching circle, each participant serves as both a coach and coachee during each working session; there is no senior coach or subject matter expert in the circle. PCCs offer community and connection with peers, and participants gain coaching skills they can use in a range of contexts.

Successful and sustainable PCCs are viable in a variety of venues, disciplines, and career stages. Successful PCCs require commitment to the structured, intentional

Mentoring ≠ Coaching

Coaching is ...	Coaching is not ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asking questions• Focusing on inquiry• Supporting self-directed learning• Developing actions (behaviors) to move toward goal attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giving advice• Offering suggestions• Sharing stories

Dos and Don'ts for Launching a PCC

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Include participants at a similar career stage✓ Include participants from different departments or institutions✓ Meet regularly and frequently enough to maintain momentum✓ Focus on building relationships, community, and trust✓ Emphasize asking powerful coaching questions✓ Use the PCC meeting structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Have a "senior" lead or guide in the group✗ Predetermine topics for each meeting✗ Focus on giving advice✗ Use an ad hoc meeting format✗ Let some individuals' work time overtake a meeting, leaving other participants without time to work✗ Reconfigure established groups without their permission

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During a PCC session, each participant has about 10 to 12 minutes of individual focused work time to address a topic of their choosing with the group.

Structure of PCC Individual Work Time		
ACTION	GOAL	FORMAT
Report back on contract from last session (1 minute)	Foster Accountability.	For my last contract, I said I will [CONTRACT]. I did [ACCOMPLISHMENT].
Dilemma statement (1 minute)	Identify the feeling and problem. Then clarify the goal.	I feel [EMOTION] about [SITUATION] and I want [GOAL].
Discussion (8 minutes)	Support the participant in improving their thinking and identifying potential paths forward that might work for them.	Other participants listen and ask powerful questions (e.g., “How long have you been feeling like that?” or “What has worked well in the past?” or “What would success look like?”).
Contract (2 minutes)	Define concrete action that will be helpful and likely to happen.	For my contract, by [TIME] I will [CONCRETE ACTION].

This work was funded in part by the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke (Grants R25NS076416 and R25NS094094) and the National Science Foundation (Grant HRD1500310) .



More about NINDS-funded BRAINS (**B**roadening the **R**epresentation of **A**cademic **I**nvigators in **N**euro**S**cience) can be found at <https://www.brains.uw.edu>.



More about NSF-funded LATTICE (**L**aunching **A**cademics on the **T**enure-**T**rack: an **I**ntentional **C**ommunity in **E**ngineering) can be found at <https://advance.washington.edu/about/national/lattice>.

Learn more about coaching and faculty development and this peer coaching circles model in Chapter 32: “Peer Coaching Circles for Ongoing Faculty Development” in the *Handbook of STEM Faculty Development*.