

FY21 CPA Project Narrative Template

Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act

Peer Support

Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office

Strength & Resilience: Peer Support

6-2-2021

Issue Identification and Solicitation Responsiveness

The Santa Barbara Sheriffs Office initiated a Strength and Resilience (S&R) Workgroup in April of 2019 to address the wellness needs and gaps for personnel within our agency. The S&R workgroup is comprised of the department psychologist, custody commander, patrol commander, patrol sergeant, civilian office professional and a dispatch supervisor. We identified 4 categories of immediate needs; Psychological, Physical, Nutritional and Peer to Peer relations.

Since the implementation of the S&R team, we have championed several initiatives to address for aforementioned needs. We have established relationships with local first responder organizations that support psychological wellness and provide psychological services to our department and their family members. We are working with a local chef who provides nutritious meals for our department members and delivers the meals to the stations. We partnered with a fitness APP that provides law enforcement centered exercise instruction and we recently opened a fitness center on campus for our employees. What we have not yet done is launched our peer support program- a piece of the wellness puzzle we know is essential to the wellbeing of our employees, not just in response to critical incidents, but in response to the growing stressors facing our department members both professionally and personally.

In 2020 the S&R group sent out a survey to department members asking who they would feel most comfortable talking to in a peer support role. We were surprised with the number of responses we received- over 150. The volume of responses indicated to our workgroup that peer support was not only needed; but was already happening in an unofficial way and without adequate training and support for the persons fielding peer support requests. We would like to utilize the grant funding offered to support and establish a well-trained peer support team for the Santa Barbara Sheriffs Office.

Approximately 7 years ago a peer support program was put together by one of our department members. The peer supporters were not trained in confidentiality and were not provided best practices and tools to support their work. Shortly after the program was launched, it became known as ineffective and damaging to department members who utilized it and ultimately the program failed. The S&R group is committed to standing up a program with members whom are professional, trained and passionate about peer support work.

We identified a need for approximately 20 peer support personnel including sworn and civilian members. We would like to send the 20 peer support personnel and the 6 S&R group members to the annual Public Safety Peer Support Conference that is held in San Diego, California. Our intention is to send half of the group this year; and half to next year's conference. We would also like to utilize funding to support ongoing training throughout the life of the grant and will utilize subject matter experts to provide instruction on peer support best practices. We will utilize funds to support team meetings and internal trainings for our peer support members in order to cultivate a cohesive and stable peer support group. Finally, funds will be utilized for overtime related to peer support call outs.

Instructions: Applicants must select one application subcategory and clearly identify the issue to be addressed, the gap in existing knowledge, and why this project is necessary. Applicants must clearly describe how this project is responsive to the solicitation. Applicants must provide a comprehensive, logical, and clear description of how each task will be implemented and completed and a clear description of how the strategy advances the goals and objectives of the solicitation. A clear description of deliverables and how the deliverables will be developed, including content, process steps, and outcomes. A clear description of how the deliverables contribute to the solicitation goals and objectives. Applicant describes a level of innovation or originality of the proposed project.

Impact on the Field

Santa Barbara County has experienced several major tragic events over the last few years including the Isla Vista mass murder and the Montecito Mud Slides. Both incidents were tragic, involved the loss of life of members of our community, and left scars on our local first responders. In response to these tragedies, local agencies including the Santa Barbara Police Department, Santa Barbara County Fire Department, Santa Barbara City Fire Department and Santa Maria Police Department have initiated and implemented peer support programs that are both internal and at the same time designed to provide support to persons from outside their own agency. Our intention at the Santa Barbara Sheriffs Office is to integrate our peer support unit with the aforementioned units to strengthen our regional peer support teams.

We will utilize metrics to define peer support success including; number of contacts made by peer supporters; number of peer support callouts and number of persons referred outside the agency for ancillary services. Additionally, we will be looking at retention rates and rates of workers compensation claims over the life of the grant to discern the impact of the program on these measures.

Once our peer support teams are trained- we will have them attend squad briefings and management meetings, and they will also provide training to department members on wellness and how to maintain a healthy career in law enforcement and mitigate the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Injury.

Instructions: Applicants must identify the approximate number of law enforcement agencies and communities that will directly benefit from the deliverables (for example, number of agencies receiving technical assistance, number of agencies and/or individuals receiving training, or number of agencies who may replicate programs). Applicants must explain why this project is necessary to address a gap in knowledge or practice. Projects must not result in unnecessary duplication of other efforts by the COPS Office or other DOJ components. Applicants must identify relevant performance measures and clearly describe the approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting performance measures. Include a description of a marketing plan for the deliverable(s) to ensure broad dissemination of the product(s) to the target audience(s), where applicable.

Project Management Plan and Strategy

The Peer Support program will be housed under the Behavioral Sciences Unit of the Criminal Investigation Division of the Sheriffs Office. Dr Lee, the department psychologist, will manage the peer support team and Sergeant Morris, coroner's sergeant, will supervise the peer support team. Should we be awarded the funding, our first step will be to send out a new survey to department members asking whom they would want to talk to when experiencing a personal or professional crisis. After we have a list of personnel, Dr. Lee will reach out to the persons nominated by their peers and solicit interest and availability. When approximately 20 peer supporters are identified, we will send the peer supporters to a basic peer support instruction course, an advanced peer support instruction course, and the annual peer support conference held in San Diego California.

Operationally, when there is a peer support call out request, on duty members of the Sheriffs peer support team will be assigned to respond. When off duty peer supporters are paged out to a scene they will be compensated for their time with funds from this grant in the form of overtime. Should they decide to respond without a page or if they engage in peer support activities outside of an official call out, they will not be compensated for their time.

Our intention is that this funding will allow us to initiate a peer support program that reaches all parts of the Sheriffs Office and includes sworn and civilian staff. Throughout the two year grant cycle we will have quarterly peer support trainings with subject matter experts in officer wellness, post-traumatic stress and critical incident stress debriefings.

Experience and Capacity

The Strength & Resilience group is managed by Dr. Cherylynn Lee, Behavioral Sciences Manager and Department Psychologist. Dr. Lee has been with the department for approximately 6 years and, in addition to her duties related to; consultation, mental health crisis calls, hostage negotiation call outs, and Crisis Intervention Team Training, Dr. Lee provides trainings and guidance on employee wellness. Dr. Lee is a subject matter expert with California Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) on officer and dispatcher wellness and has participated in several training videos and projects. In addition to working for the Sheriffs Office, Dr. Lee has a private practice where she treats first responders exclusively. She has treated over 50 first responders, most of whom are law enforcement, and has an in depth understanding of cultural competency and the experiences of law enforcement related to the stress and challenges of the job. Dr. Lee will be responsible for the management of the peer support team including; assigning training, debriefing personnel, and problem-solving critical issues and incidents.

Sergeant Jarrett Morris has been with the Sheriffs Office for over 10 years. He is currently assigned to the coroners bureau and is the collaterally assigned sergeant for our K-9s. His passion for peer support does not go un noticed. Several supervisors within the agency communicate on a regular basis with Sergeant Morris when their subordinates are facing personal and professional problems. He will supervise the peer support team by providing direct instruction; approving overtime; ensuring the cohesiveness of the team and problem solving any issues or concerns that may arise.

There are four additional S&R group members, Kristi Nelson (AOP); Ben Johnson (Dispatch Supervisor) Kevin Huddle (Patrol Commander) Ryan Sullivan (Custody Commander). These persons are designated to support peer support and notify peer supporters of any concerns they have about personnel in their division.