Peer Assist

What it is?
A facilitated in-person or virtual event in which peers with relevant experience share their knowledge and experience, usually in the form of best practices and lessons learned, with a team that has requested help on a specific problem, project, or activity. TCI used this technique virtually to brainstorm solutions and learn from each Accelerator Hub related to incentivizing local government commitment and release, which is a common challenge.

When to use it?

- Before doing a project or activity:
    - When starting a new activity that would benefit from the advice of more experienced people
    - When faced with a problem that another group has overcome in the past
    - When you are planning a project that is similar to a project another group has completed

Instructions

1. **Define the specific problem** and be sure that your aim in calling a peer assist is to learn something.
2. **Do some research** to find out who else has already solved or tackled a similar problem. Also, share your peer assist plans with others, as there may be other teams who are currently tackling a similar problem who could also benefit from participating in the peer assist.
3. **Select participants** who have diverse knowledge, skills, and experiences. Look “across” the organization rather than “up”. Avoid the temptation to select “the usual suspects.” If the same experts are selected for peer assists again and again, you may be limiting the number of fresh ideas and perspectives available to you. Similarly, seek to select people who will challenge your ways of thinking and working and perhaps offer a different angle.
4. **Identify a facilitator.** This should be someone outside of the host team who is seeking the assistance.
5. Ensure that you **plan a date for the peer assist that is early enough in your project to make use of the input** you receive and to do something different on the basis of what you have learned.

Steps for conducting a peer assist

1. Allow time in your agenda for the teams to get to know one another. It is important to build rapport so that the group can work openly together.
2. The host team presents the context, history, and ideas regarding the task or issue at hand. This should occur in an open and flexible manner to allow its redefinition during the session.

3. The resource team should ask questions and have a dialogue with the host team to develop a good understanding of the issues (background materials can be sent ahead of time to resource team).
4. The resource team identifies options to solve the problem. The host team listens carefully, and the facilitator records these options.
5. The resource team presents their final feedback. The host team needs to take the recommendations from the resource team without interrupting or defending past efforts and decisions.
6. Make sure to have a formal conclusion and feedback session at the end of the peer assist to summarize the outcomes. Generally, someone from the host team will do this.
7. Produce a short (1-2 page) write-up on the peer assist, describing the activity conducted, learnings gained, and any resultant action steps planned, and include in the quarterly Hub report.

Time Commitment

- The length of a peer assist depends on the complexity of the problem and the geographic range participants are coming from. Short sessions may last 90 minutes, while long sessions may be spread over several days (typically no more than 2 days).