PEER ADVISORY GROUPS
Top 10…Structures That Work

1. **A safe environment:** It is essential to create a safe environment for each group. This is the foundation on which trust and openness among the members is built and is paramount above all other objectives and wishes we have for the groups.

2. **Relationship Building:** A key ingredient to a successful group is having members form genuine bonds with one another. Keep in mind this takes time. It can also be powerful to witness as a facilitator. This happens as members feel safe being open and vulnerable with one another and when they are willing to share their successes and be honest about their challenges.

3. **Group Norms:** Each Peer Advisory Group will establish norms of how they agree to behave and engage with one another. It is the facilitator's responsibility to have the group norms visible at each meeting and to periodically reinforce and discuss the norms and what they mean to each group. This also serves as a reminder of the importance of the group's safety. Peer Advisory Groups have one non-negotiable norm – *confidentiality* – what is shared in the group stays in the group. We encourage the discussion of leadership ideas and strategies outside of the group and want people to take and share those concepts within their organizations and networks. It is not acceptable to discuss any personal/sensitive information about other members outside of the group. We will do all we can to prevent this from happening and if it does, we will address it immediately and take any actions necessary to restore the safety and trust among the group.

4. **Sharing the Space:** It's important to make sure everyone has a voice in each meeting while also acknowledging there are introverts, extroverts and all styles in between in each group. This is something for group facilitators to be aware of and, if it's a group norm, it's also the group's responsibility to share the space and make sure it is being shared. There may be times when a group member is taking too much airtime on their issue or monopolizing the conversation. It could involve a member being disrespectful or abrasive in their comments to other members, which can cause people to shut down and not participate. Most situations can be addressed respectfully in the moment by reminding the group of the norms. If the facilitator perceives feeling have been hurt, it's best to check in with members off line and listen to understand what they were experiencing in the moment, then determine if any follow up is needed. As stated above, it's best to periodically remind all members that they are responsible for adhering to the norms and speaking up if they feel they are being dismissed.

5. **Check in:** Group meetings start with a "check in" and this practice is a key part of building relationships among members. How check-ins are structure is flexible. Sometimes they involve a series of questions meant to be answered quickly by each member before diving into the topic. Sometimes it provides the platform to share updates on action items they have declared in the previous meeting. The check in is also used as a way to get to know one another better and to continue the relationships building process. It can also provide a way for members to get present in the meeting and share any distractions and/or time constraints they have so they can give the group 100% of their focus. We can provide a sample of check in questions used over the years.

6. **Group Discussions/Resources:** Groups spend time in each meeting discussing a topic focused on the people side of leadership. The topics vary and members are given a voice and choice in selecting subjects that interest them most and will help them grow and develop. Topics can include: communication, goal setting, boundary setting, teamwork, difficult conversations, dealing with change, organizational culture, time management, among many others. These discussions are jumpstarted by using carefully vetted resources sent out ahead of time for review. Resources range from journal articles, blog posts, videos, podcasts, activities, quotes and other online content from a variety of relevant and noteworthy sources. This provides a way for members to apply leadership concepts to real life situations they are facing. In addition, we encourage members to share and use these resources within their organizations/networks for others to benefit.

7. **Action Items:** Another purpose for Peer Advisory Groups is to provide a safe space where people can claims goals/action items and report out on their progress. At the end of each meeting, group members are given time to complete an action plan and share a quick summary of what they plan to do. If time is running short, it's also effective to have members share their action item verbally and have the facilitator or note taker record these and share them back out with the group.

8. **Accountability:** The groups provide members with an opportunity to be held accountable to the group and the commitment they made to their own learning and growth; to show up and be prepared; to be open and vulnerable about successes and failures and willing to receive feedback. Groups also offer a platform for members to be held accountable to goals they have shared and the action items they claim in each meeting. The group is a place to be accountable to

changes members want to make, personally and professionally. It's powerful to see how excited group members get to hear updates and progress from their peers. It's most effective to have members share an update on action items during the check in. You can also have people pair up and share updates to deepen connections between members and for time efficiency.

9. **PAG Agreement (Optional):** Each group member will sign a contract that specifies the purpose of PAGs, expectations of all involved, the commitment being made and accountability. We use this agreement as a statement of our commitment to them and their commitment to each other and the group overall. The agreement is sent in advance for individuals to review and will be discussed and agreed upon / signed by all at the first meeting.

10. **Meeting Coordination and Other Logistics:** Members join a group understanding they are making a commitment to attending meetings on a regular basis and doing the pre-work assigned as well as being accountable to report on their actions claimed in meetings. One aspect of our role as meeting facilitators is to coordinate the meetings and handle logistics – room setup (if applicable), agenda planning, resource selection and such. We send meeting reminders one week out and follow up emails with action items claimed as well as any key takeaways and other important notes generated from the group discussions so members have this information for referral. We include hyperlinks to resources suggested in the discussions and encourage members to share their favorite resources with the group at any time. We send out a contact list and encourage members to stay connected to one another between meetings, reinforcing the importance of using their group network for input and support on issues they know others have experienced or to get another perspective from a trust source.