



**AIDSCAP**

How to  
Create an  
Effective  
Peer Education  
Project

Guidelines for AIDS  
Prevention Projects

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# Introduction

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**This handbook is one in a series of practical “How-To” handbooks developed by AIDSCAP’s Behavior Change Communication (BCC) Unit. Its main objective is to help field-level planners and implementors who:**

- ▶ **Are planning a new peer education project, and**
- ▶ **Want to strengthen or energize ongoing projects.**

The information in this handbook is based on interviews with over 200 AIDSCAP subproject managers, peer educators and peer beneficiaries in ten countries. It presents advice from experienced HIV/AIDS BCC practitioners about:

- ▶ Activities that are appropriate for peer educators
- ▶ Recruitment and selection of peer educators
- ▶ Community acceptance and support for peer educators
- ▶ Training topics for peer educators
- ▶ Supervision and support for peer educators
- ▶ The role of educational materials and condoms in peer education projects.

In addition to this handbook, the following AIDSCAP BCC handbooks can guide you as you develop a peer education project:

*How to Create an Effective Communication Project*

*Behavior Change Through Mass Communication*

*How to Conduct Effective Pretests*

*Assessment and Monitoring of BCC Interventions*

*HIV/AIDS Care and Support Projects*

*BCC for STD Prevention*

*Partnership with the Media*

*Policy and Advocacy Work on HIV/AIDS Prevention*

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# What is Peer Education?

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Peer education occurs in a variety of settings and includes many different activities. Peer education may be:

- ▶ Factory workers giving HIV prevention talks in the cafeteria during lunch hour.
- ▶ Women from a women's group making house-to-house calls to distribute leaflets and talk with homemakers.
- ▶ Out-of-school youth organizing video and information shows for other young people.
- ▶ Military personnel counseling new recruits.
- ▶ Students meeting in dormitories to demonstrate correct condom use.
- ▶ Commercial sex workers discussing STD treatment.

In all cases, non-professional teachers—that is, peer educators, are talking to, working with and motivating their peers.

Peer education can take place on a street corner, at a social club, in a bar, on school grounds, in a home, in a church, at a bus station, in a factory, on a farm or any other place where people feel comfortable.

Regardless of where they take place and who is targeted, all peer education projects have certain elements in common:

- ▶ They use **trained** people to assist **others in their peer group** to **make decisions** about STDs/HIV/AIDS through **activities** undertaken in **one-to-one or small group settings**.



**Remember:**

**Peer educators can play an important role in creating new opportunities for their peers to talk about gender relations and sexual relationships.**

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# Benefits of a Peer Education Approach

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AIDSCAP managers and implementors report many advantages of peer education. They say that peer education is:

▶ **Culturally appropriate**

“Peer education provides a means of delivering culturally sensitive messages from within.”

▶ **Community-based**

“Peer education is a community-level intervention which supports and supplements other programs. It is a link to other community-based strategies.”

▶ **Accepted** by their target audiences

“Many peers report that they are more comfortable relating to a peer about their personal concerns such as sexuality.”

▶ **Economical**

“Peer educators provide a large service at a small cost and they provide that service very effectively.”



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# Should I Use a Peer Education Approach?

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Peer education can be useful and powerful. However, it is not appropriate in all situations. You will need to do some formative research to decide whether peer education is the best approach to meet your objectives. Also, before making your final decision, use the following questions to help you think about the appropriateness of peer education for your target audience.

1. What are the goals of this project? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the target audience? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Will it be possible to attract and maintain interest and support for this project from opinion leaders and influential people in the target community?  
 Yes     No

If the answer is “no,” a peer education strategy may not be appropriate.

4. Are there people within the target group who have the time, interest and ability to work as peer educators?  
 Yes     No

If the answer is “no,” you should develop another strategy that does not involve peer education.

5. What will these peer educators need to do?  
 Teach their peers about STDs/HIV/AIDS.  
 Teach their peers how to avoid becoming infected.

Should I Use a Peer Education Approach? \_\_\_\_\_

- Create more supportive and understanding attitudes toward people who are infected with HIV.
  - Recognize risks and risky situations.
  - Teach peers how to care for people living with HIV/AIDS.
  - Make referrals to health care workers.
  - Empower peers to make informed lifestyle decisions.
  - Emphasize decision making, assertiveness and relationship skills.
  - Support the maintenance of behavior change.
6. What will the peer educators need in order to meet these objectives?
- Initial training
  - Refresher training
  - Educational materials
  - Condoms
  - Penis model or dildo for condom demonstrations
  - Supervision
  - Meeting space
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Can the project provide these things?

- Yes     No

If the answer is "no," examine the goal(s) of the project. You might need to change the goal, reduce the size of the target group or use a different strategy (not peer education).

8. How large is the target group? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many peer educators will be needed to reach the members of this target group? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Can the project train and support that many peer educators?

- Yes     No

If the answer is "no," examine the goal(s) of the project. You might need to change the goal, reduce the size of the target group or use a different strategy (not peer education).

11. Will the peer educators need incentives?

- Yes     No

If "yes," what type of incentives will they need?

- Salaries  
 Paid expenses  
 Meal allowances  
 Bicycles  
 Special badges or awards  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Can the project provide these incentives?

- Yes     No

If "no," what are other options? \_\_\_\_\_

12. How long will the peer education continue? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Can the peer educators be supported with supervision, refresher training and incentives over the long term?

- Yes     No

If the answer is "no," examine the goal(s) of the project. You might need to change the goals, reduce the size of the target group or use a different strategy (not peer education).

Should I Use a Peer Education Approach? 

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14. How many staff members will be needed to help train and supervise the required number of peer educators? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Does my budget include supervision expenses?

- Yes     No

If the answer is "no," you must find a way to provide regular ongoing supervision.

16. Are other communication strategies used in this HIV/AIDS prevention project?

- Yes     No

If "yes," how will peer education complement them?

Your answers to these questions will help you decide whether a peer education approach is possible or appropriate for your situation. When thinking about the budget, include funds for recruitment and training of peer educators, refresher training, supervision, materials and condom supplies.



**Remember:**

**If you believe that peer education is an appropriate strategy for your HIV/AIDS prevention project, please review the information in the AIDSCAP booklet entitled, *How to Create an Effective Communication Project*. It will help you design your peer education project.**

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# Activities Expected of Peer Educators

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**Before selecting and training peer educators, it is important to think about the objectives of the project and the activities that will help you meet those objectives. These activities will determine the type of training, support, supervision and materials you will need to provide.**

Some common activities performed by peer educators are listed in the chart below. It will give you some ideas for your project. Check the activities that you think will be useful in your peer education project.

<b>Activities to Increase Awareness of HIV and STDs Among Peers:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct informal small group discussions about HIV/AIDS	<input type="checkbox"/> Hold regular meetings
<input type="checkbox"/> Organize and conduct formal group discussions about HIV/AIDS	<input type="checkbox"/> Distribute educational materials
<input type="checkbox"/> Teach peers about reproductive health and STD detection and treatment	<input type="checkbox"/> Display posters and other educational materials
<input type="checkbox"/> Organize meetings and educational sessions (to be taught by someone else)	<input type="checkbox"/> Present video screenings
<input type="checkbox"/> Participate in World AIDS Day and other public events	<input type="checkbox"/> Design/develop educational materials
	<input type="checkbox"/> Perform dramas
	<input type="checkbox"/> Organize sports events

<b>Activities to Motivate and Support Behavior Change:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Talk to peers one-on-one	<input type="checkbox"/> condom use)
<input type="checkbox"/> Teach peers how to do a personal risk assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide individual counseling
<input type="checkbox"/> Teach peers how to negotiate safer sex (including	<input type="checkbox"/> Recommend or refer peers for HIV testing
<b>Condom Promotion, Distribution and Education Activities:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Distribute free condoms	<input type="checkbox"/> Teach condom use (buying, storing, opening, using, disposing) skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Sell condoms	
<input type="checkbox"/> Give condom demonstrations	
<b>Activities Related to Care and Support of People Living with AIDS:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Support people affected by HIV/AIDS	<input type="checkbox"/> Make visits to hospitals or homes of AIDS patients
<input type="checkbox"/> Teach peers about home care	
<b>Other Activities:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide referrals to health care facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> generating activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Take part in income-	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____



**Remember:**

**You must train and supervise the peer educators who will do these activities. Do not select activities that will require more supervision than you can provide.**



**Important:**

**Although you determine the types of activities the project will undertake, the peer educators should be involved in planning the specifics of each activity.**

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# Recruitment and Selection of Peer Educators

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## A. Qualities to Look For

Experience from AIDSCAP-supported peer education projects shows that people selected to be peer educators should meet most, if not all, of the following criteria.

Check all the qualities that are necessary for the activities you expect peer educators to do.

- They should have the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively with their peers.
- They should have good interpersonal skills, including listening skills.
- They should have a socio-cultural background similar to that of the target audience (this may include age, sex and social class).
- They should be accepted and respected by the target group (their peers).
- They should have a nonjudgmental attitude.
- They should be strongly motivated to work toward HIV risk reduction.
- They should demonstrate care, compassion and respect for people affected by HIV/AIDS.
- They should be self-confident and show potential for leadership.
- They should be able to pass a practical, knowledge-based exam at the end of the training.
- They should have the time and energy to devote to this work.

## Recruitment and Selection of Peer Educators

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- They should have the potential to be a “safer-sex” role model for their peers.
- They should be able to get to the location of the target audience.
- They should be able to work irregular hours.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Important:**

**People living with HIV or AIDS can be powerful peer educators. Some may choose to divulge their serostatus; others will not. In either case, however, they may be sensitive and insightful peer educators.**



**Important:**

**Trained health workers can also be effective peer educators.**



**Important:**

**Think about requiring peer educators to participate in a two-week internship prior to selection.**

**B. Recruiting the Peer Educators**

AIDSCAP peer education projects usually recruit peer educators from the targeted communities. Peer educators may be recruited in places frequented by the target audience, such as youth organizations, church associations, other community development organizations, factories, hotels, bars, or brothels. Sometimes projects announce that volunteers are needed, then carefully interview suitable applicants. Before recruiting peer educators for your project, consider these questions.

- 1. How and where do you intend to recruit peer educators?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 2. If you are recruiting young people, will parental consent be necessary?  
 Yes     No

- 3. How many will you need to recruit and train? \_\_\_\_\_

- 4. What particular skills, previous experience or personal characteristics will the peer educators need? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 5. How will you determine whether they have the skills, experience and other characteristics? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**One way to identify candidates for peer educators is to observe the group's behavior and then find the natural opinion leaders in the group.**



**Important:**

**It is a good idea to recruit peer educators from other community development organizations. People involved in community work are often excellent peer educators and will understand HIV/AIDS as both a socioeconomic and a health issue.**



**Important:**

**Recruit and train more peer educators than you need. Some will probably drop out.**

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# Comprehensive Training of Peer Educators

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AIDSCAP implementing agencies have discovered that it is less expensive to implement peer education programs if the initial training is very thorough. Where training is comprehensive, fewer peer educators drop out and less supervision and retraining are needed later.

After you decide exactly what you want the peer educators to do and what background and experience they should have, you can decide on the content and the length of training. The activities you selected on pages 13 and 14 will help you decide which topics need to be taught during training.

Training can be given in a number of ways, including half-day sessions spread out over an extended period or full-day sessions for an entire week or more. Regardless of what schedule you choose, formal training should be supplemented by on-the-job training and supervision.



**Important:**

**Be sure to plan enough time so that trainees can give several practice presentations. Give them constructive feedback and help them improve the way they approach peers, present information and provide support for behavior change.**



**Important:**

**Give peer educator trainees a written or oral exam at the end of training. Only those who clearly demonstrate their understanding of the course content should be allowed to become peer educators.**

**A. Training Peer Educators to Increase Awareness of STDs/HIV**

If the peer educator is expected to give information and increase awareness of STDs/HIV, then most of the topics on the next page should be addressed in the training program.

**Goal: To increase awareness of HIV and STDs among peers.**

Think about the activities the peer educators will need to do. Check all the training topics that should be covered.

- The role of a peer educator
- Human sexuality (including male and female body parts and functions)
- Basic facts about STDs/HIV/AIDS (including difference between HIV and AIDS)
- Attitudes and values people have about illness and sexuality
- How to respond to myths and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS
- How to prevent transmission (including condom use)
- What puts their peers at risk of exposure to HIV (risk factors)
- Facts about HIV antibody testing
- Information about STDs (including symptoms, complications, treatment locations, partner notification and prevention)
- Issues important to women
- Effective communication, including:
  - overcoming communication barriers
  - approaching a peer and beginning a dialogue
  - active listening
  - presenting clear information and getting feedback
  - talking to groups
  - using visual aids and audiovisual equipment
  - discussing sexuality
  - maintaining confidentiality
  - establishing a climate of mutual respect and empathy
- Planning and record keeping skills
- Using local resources for referrals, care, treatment, support and information

**B. Training Peer Educators in Condom Promotion, Distribution, and Education**

If peer educators are expected to distribute condoms and instruct peers in condom use, additional topics should be added to the training.

**Goal: To promote and distribute condoms.**

Think about the activities the peer educators will need to do. Check all the training topics that should be covered.

- Basic facts about condoms
- How to distribute or sell condoms
- How to use and dispose of condoms
- How to conduct condom demonstrations
- How to store condoms

### C. Training Peer Educators to Motivate and Support Behavior Change

If, in addition to providing information, the peer educators are expected to motivate and support behavior change, the following topics should be added to the training curriculum.

**Goal: To motivate and support behavior change.**

Think about the activities the peer educators will need to do. Check all the training topics that should be covered.

- How to motivate others
- Risk assessment techniques
- Understanding social norms and peer pressure and their roles in behavior change
- The process of behavior change
- Condom and sex-related negotiation and refusal skills
- Sexual decision making
- Communication for safer sex (including assertiveness skills)
- Personal and community values about sexuality and HIV/AIDS
- The role of alcohol and drugs in HIV transmission
- How to support behavior change (including follow-up activities)
- Counseling techniques (including listening, language, confidentiality, rapport, referrals and record keeping)
- Living with HIV infection
- Psychological, social and ethical issues involved in educating and counseling peers about sexuality and STDs, including HIV infection

## D. Training Peer Educators to Deal with Care and Support Issues

If the peer educators are expected to deal with care and support of people living with HIV and others affected by HIV/AIDS, then more topics must be added to the training.

**Goal: To offer care and support for people affected by HIV/AIDS.**

Think about the activities the peer educators will need to do. Check all the training topics that should be covered.

- Techniques for working with families and communities
- Empathy toward those infected with HIV
- Human rights issues
- Basic home-based care techniques
- Moral support and counseling of people affected by HIV



**Important:**

**Training is not a one-time event. No one completes training and is fully prepared to do the job! The peer educators must have both continual on-the-job training and more formal refresher training.**

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# Support and Supervision of Peer Educators

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The amount of supervision and support peer educators need will depend on:

- ▶ the **types of activities** they do. (Peer educators who conduct large group educational sessions may need more supervision and support than those who meet peers casually; also, those who deal with emotionally difficult situations may need more support.)
- ▶ the **amount of training** they have had. (Peer educators who have had only a day or two of training may have more support and information needs than those who have had more thorough training.)

## A. Support

Support for peer education projects can include a number of things. Check the **support** activities you plan to use in the project.

- Regular, in-service meetings for all peer educators
- Additional educational materials for peer educators' own use (e.g., a peer educator's handbook)
- IEC materials and condoms for distribution to peers
- Certificates, badges, t-shirts, bags or hats to identify them as trained peer educators and acknowledge their contribution to the project
- Supervisor availability to help peer educators deal with discouraging or difficult experiences
- AIDS information booklets that give answers to commonly asked questions
- Special activities just for fun
- Linkage with other community groups

- Referral book that allows educators to send peers to other available resources
- Opportunities for established peer educators to teach and mentor new peer educators.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### B. Supervision

Supervision helps ensure that the peer educators are doing a good job. There are various ways that peer educators can be supervised. Check the **supervision** techniques you will use.

- One-to-one visits or meetings with peer educators to answer their questions and observe them at work
- Group meetings to resolve common problems
- Peer review of peer educator's performance
- Observation of peer educators during their activities
- Evaluation of peer educators' performance and feedback to them about the evaluation
- Monthly written or oral reports and your responses to them
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Remember:**

Even with excellent training, not all peer educators will be fully prepared to do a good job. The continuing improvement of your project depends on good supervision and monitoring.



**Important:**

If you don't have a budget and staff to provide supervision and support, peer educators may become discouraged and stop doing peer education work.

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# Community Acceptance and Support

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**Peer education is not an isolated activity. It takes place in a community and must be understood, accepted and respected by the community. If issues are identified by the community then acceptance will not be a problem. Developing and maintaining a positive and supportive community environment is the job of the project manager and staff.**

Before deciding to implement a peer education project, the project manager and staff should:

- ▶ Identify and meet with influential leaders of the intended target audience. Search out leaders in appropriate sectors: religion, business, sports, education, health, media, politics, entertainment, agriculture, government, and so on.
- ▶ Talk to the leaders about the needs of the target audience and discuss which of those needs peer educators might be able to meet.
- ▶ Explain the plans for peer education, including how many peers will be trained, where they will work, what they will be expected to do, and how they will relate to other health care and development workers. Ask for their opinions and advice.
- ▶ Include a variety of leaders (religious, business, education, health, political, government) in all formative research. For example, when conducting a situation analysis as part of the development of a behavior change communication project, make sure leaders are interviewed.

During the course of the peer education activities, the project manager and staff should:

- ▶ Continue to meet formally and informally with the influential leaders and inform them of all new activities.
- ▶ Invite them to any ceremonial occasions. Invite them to be guest speakers.
- ▶ Ask them to review new BCC materials.
- ▶ Supply them with the STD/HIV educational materials used in the project.
- ▶ Encourage them to speak to others about the value of this peer education activity.
- ▶ Ask them to write articles or letters to the editor about the project.
- ▶ Encourage peer educators to talk to leaders about their work with pride and enthusiasm.

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# Educational Materials and Condom Supplies

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## A. Educational Materials

Peer educators in AIDSCAP projects say that their peers want to receive educational materials to take home.

Leaflets (brochures) are the most common material given out by peer educators. Educational materials should be easy to understand and should address specific concerns of the target audience. Some audiences may need pictorial materials that do not require reading. Information about developing and pretesting appropriate materials can be found in other AIDSCAP handbooks.

Most peer educators lack the time and the expertise to develop educational materials. If professional project staff cannot develop materials based on input from the peer educators, then look to the national AIDS control program or other organizations that are doing STD/HIV work. They may be able to provide suitable materials.

## B. Condom Supplies

In many countries, peer educators either sell or distribute free condoms. If this is an activity that you plan for your peer educators, make sure there is a reliable source of condoms. Most condom social marketing organizations are happy to cooperate with peer education projects. They will often sell condoms to the project at wholesale prices, allowing the peer educators to make a small profit by selling them at a marked-up retail price. This can be a financial incentive for peer educators to continue their work.

If you intend to work with a social marketing organization, you will need to budget funds to buy the initial supply of condoms. Thereafter, new supplies can be bought using the receipts from the condoms sold by the project. Condom social marketing organizations may also help the peer educators by providing basic training in salesmanship, simple accounting, and the storage and use of condoms.

Other possible sources of condoms are the national AIDS control program, the Ministry of Health or the UNFPA.



**Remember:**

**Condom social marketing organizations can be a valuable resource and partner to peer education projects.**

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# Common Difficulties in Peer Education Projects

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Both managers and peer educators have encountered some difficulties in peer education projects. Their experience provides good advice for readers who are developing a peer education project.

## A. Difficulties Faced by Peer Educators

Peer educators listed a number of factors that can make their work difficult. Be prepared to help your peer educators overcome problems such as:

- ▶ Peer resistance (or shyness) to talking about STDs and HIV infection
- ▶ Lack of time (particularly for student and military peer educators)
- ▶ Lack of space to hold meetings
- ▶ Rudeness during condom demonstrations (particularly for female peer educators working with male students)

## B. Barriers Encountered by Program Managers

Project managers advise that you consider the following potential barriers when you plan your peer education project:

- ▶ “If peer educators just communicate basic knowledge which many in the group of peers have already heard, they will reject the peer educator and the message.” (*Section V*)
- ▶ “Interventions that only give information do not bring about risk-reducing changes in behavior. Skills must be taught.” (*Section V*)
- ▶ “Due to changes in their time and interest, student or youth peer educators may not be available for more than one year.” (*Section VI*)

- ▶ “An intensive and sustained effort is needed for behavior change. Not all peer educators can give this much effort.” (Section VI)
- ▶ “In some places, credibility is based on age and/or gender. So, for example, older male adults might be more effective with young people of both sexes. Therefore, being a peer is not necessarily the solution.” (Section VI)
- ▶ “If peer educators are not provided with adequate training and support, they will never be more than just providers of knowledge and materials. They need comprehensive training and support to become behavior change specialists.” (Section VII)
- ▶ “There is always a variation in the peer educators’ skills and motivation. This makes it difficult to evaluate the project.” (Section VIII)
- ▶ “The success of peer education is not only due to well-trained and motivated peer educators. The gatekeepers (e.g., managers of factories, bar owners, school officials) must also cooperate and allow the time and space for the peer education activities.” (Section IX)
- ▶ “It can be difficult to get educational manuals with updated information on AIDS or manuals for peer educators.” (Section X)



**Remember:**

**Although you should be aware of potential difficulties, you should also be aware that they can be overcome. Planning in advance to avoid such problems can make the difference between an average intervention and an excellent project. Read the quotes above, and review the listed sections for further guidance on overcoming the difficulties you might encounter.**

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# Final Thoughts

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Peer education projects are some of the most effective and interesting HIV/AIDS prevention projects. In addition to the six criteria discussed in Sections V-X, other factors need your attention. Some of the issues and questions you may face as you plan and implement a peer education project are listed below. There are no answers that are right for all projects. However, there are answers that are right for your project.

- ▶ Should the peer educators be paid? Will it enhance their self-esteem and commitment to the program? Will the project be better if there are incentive payments? What is an appropriate incentive? Should peer educators have to account for the incentive payment? If peer educators are paid, how long can the project be sustained? How can peer educators be motivated if they are not paid?
- ▶ Should the peer educators only provide information, leaving counseling and support activities to professional staff?
- ▶ Should this peer education project be linked with other health and community development projects? Would this make the project more sustainable? Is it possible to share the costs of training, materials development and supervision with other NGOs?
- ▶ Should this peer education intervention be linked with treatment or service provision?
- ▶ Should the peer educators broaden their knowledge and areas of concern to include other health issues such, as family planning, nutrition and home-based care?
- ▶ Should the peer education approach be coordinated with other HIV risk reduction activities, such as mass media?
- ▶ Should this peer education intervention work with educational institutions in the community?
- ▶ How should this project be evaluated?