

PEER/Resident Conference Call “How-To”

- Select a date/time that works for the residents. We avoid meal times, early mornings, late afternoons and polled our residents for the best day of the week based on activity schedules – church, etc. We are now in a routine of using Monday afternoons at 1:30
- The residents will most likely need helpers – especially at first. We engaged local ombudsmen- staff and volunteers – to go to the facilities where the residents live and assist them with connecting, logging in, muting phone lines, etc. In order to have the ombudsmen assist, we had to give them enough notice and explain to them what we were trying to accomplish, etc.
- We also provided the local ombudsmen and PEERs a brief explanation to use with the facility when arranging for the call. Residents need a room with a speaker phone. Sometimes, they need assistance in getting to that room or reserving that space. Some facilities will also provide internet access – so we needed to help that facilities understand what we were doing – most never had residents participating in a conference call before.
- You need to have a toll-free conference line. We use Webex and the cost is covered by the State Ombudsman Office. Residents often cannot make long-distance calls; especially calls that last over an hour.
- We email the call announcement – including the agenda and connection information to the local ombudsmen and some residents at least 3 weeks in advance. A reminder is sent in another two weeks- one week prior to the call.
- The agenda is consistent from call to call:
 1. Updates from the state office/regional ombudsman specialist
 2. Discussion about topic agreed upon during prior call
 3. Request for topic suggestions for the next conference call
 4. Selection of date for next call – **calls are scheduled every other month**
- The technology is a blessing and a challenge. Each call offers an internet link so participants can log-in and see the PowerPoint or documents being shared AND a toll-free phone number so they can call in for the audio/ participate in the discussion. MOST residents do not use the internet connection because they struggle with access. So that requires a lot of descriptive language and patience. Often, files are emailed to local ombudsmen so they can copy and bring to the facility for residents to see during the call. The background noise is quite a challenge. Most connections are more than one resident. It’s typically a small group, sitting around a large table in an activity area or spare office. Each connection has to be muted and un-muted during the call to allow for conversation and to minimize background noise. To assist with that, another ombudsman specialist “mans” the participant screen on the Webex connection and manually mutes “hot” lines.
- The calls last 60 – 75 minutes and the pace is determined by the residents. They share experiences, ideas, suggestions and concerns. They network with each other and share ideas about situations that are a challenge to them. The residents in PA love the calls and look forward to them. Many of our ombudsmen attend the calls with their residents and are actively involved in learning and networking as well.

- The ombudsman specialist who facilitates the call takes notes and provides some very basic minutes when the email for the next PEER conference call is sent to the locals.
- We have sometimes had “guests” on our conference calls: the Secretary of Aging, the Director of the Department of Health’s Bureau of Licensing, the Director of Human Services Licensing at DHS (Personal Care Homes), the president of the state culture change coalition, Consumer Voice staff, ombudsmen from other states and even elected officials. These calls have linked residents to people that need to hear from them and have been very powerful in terms of making an impact.
- We average over 100 participants per call so we do not do a “roll call”. Locals email us with the attendance information after each call.