

# Leverage the power of peer learning

A unique CEO roundtable system designed especially for leaders of second-stage companies, PeerSpectives® enhances leadership abilities and improves decision-making.

These roundtables, which typically involve eight to 12 business executives, provide a confidential forum where participants can share challenges and experiences — and enhance their capabilities.

So what sets PeerSpectives apart from other roundtables? Hallmarks include:

- Trained facilitators.
- Experience sharing rather than advice giving.
- Participants come from noncompeting industries.
- Structured protocol that ensures balanced discussion and releases the group genius.

“No one talks too long or too little,” explains Dino Signore, manager of entrepreneurial education at the Edward Lowe Foundation. “Time is built into each session to discuss new problems and give updates on past issues, which is important for establishing accountability.”

One of the things that makes peer learning so appealing is the just-in-time, on-target feedback, says

Penny Lewandowski, the foundation’s vice president of entrepreneurship and strategic direction. “You’re sitting with a group of people who are facing the same issues you are and who truly know what it’s like to be in your shoes.”

The Women Presidents’ Organization (WPO) requires all of its chapter chairs to go through PeerSpectives facilitator training at the foundation within a year of being hired.

“We like the Edward Lowe process because it works,” says Susan Diamond, vice president of facilitation and chief learning officer at WPO in Washington, D.C. “Some people may initially question the process as being too structured, but once they put it into practice, they see how powerful it is.”

Besides being highly effective, peer learning is an educational process that second-stage entrepreneurs readily embrace. “Second-stagers are incredibly time-pressed people who don’t usually show up for traditional networking or educational events,” says Signore. “Because they’re so busy working on their businesses, second-stagers often feel very isolated. Being with other entrepreneurs is like discovering their long-lost tribe. For many, it’s the first time they feel they’re in a trusted environment and can talk openly about their businesses.”



## Who should participate?

PeerSpectives was designed especially for founders and CEOs of second-stage companies (establishments with 10 to 99 employees and \$1 million to \$50 million in annual revenue, although these boundaries fluctuate, depending on industry). What’s key is that participants have the aptitude and appetite for growth.

The methodology has also been used successfully for individuals from noncompeting organizations with the same level of responsibilities, such as operations, marketing or finance. In addition, leaders of nonprofit groups, such as entrepreneur support organizations, have also formed PeerSpectives roundtables.

## Who should offer PeerSpectives?

- Nonprofit entrepreneur support organizations.
- Educational institutions.
- For-profit consultants looking to offer a new service.

The PeerSpectives license is available from the Edward Lowe Foundation. Fees are \$700 for nonprofit groups and \$1,000 for for-profits. The license is nonexclusive, which means different organizations can run concurrent roundtables throughout a region.

Licensing fees include: facilitator training, manuals for both facilitators and participants, marketing materials, and documents for running a roundtable.

### Real-world outcomes

"We're tasked by the Small Business Administration and the state of Michigan to help owners grow their businesses, secure financing, create jobs, retain jobs and start businesses. Working with PeerSpectives is a purposeful effort that helps us perform our mission. I can draw a direct line between my efforts as a PeerSpectives facilitator to outcomes that I report to the SBA. It is exciting to be engaged with CEOs as they accomplish their respective milestones while being an integral part of the roundtable."

— Harry Blecker, senior growth business consultant with the Michigan SBDC

### Flexible format

"We've been running PeerSpectives roundtables for several years. Participants really like it because it provides a safe environment for discussing not only their business challenges but also personal issues. Unlike some other roundtable formats, there's no pre-determined content with PeerSpectives. It's a very flexible format: Everyone gets to pitch a topic, and then the group then decides what topic to discuss first. It's timely and relevant, enabling members to get urgent needs addressed."

— Nicole Luisi, product manager at Aileron in Dayton, Ohio

### Powerful kinship

"We looked at other roundtable models, but were impressed with the simplicity of the PeerSpectives system, and the accountability it sparks among participants. I've seen participants grow both personally and professionally, and the kinship is powerful. Within the first 20 minutes of seeing the program in action they understand the value of the roundtable — and after the first meeting, no one complains about the cost."

— Steve Bryant, executive director of the Gayle and Bill Cook Center for Entrepreneurship at Ivy Tech Community College in Bloomington, Indiana

## PRESS: New roundtable format for emerging second-stagers

Do you have high potential first stagers who could benefit from PeerSpectives, but who haven't yet advanced into second stage?

The PeerSpectives Roundtable for the Emerging Second-Stager (PRESS) combines the benefits of a roundtable and interactions with business experts.

PRESS is geared to Stage 1 business owners who have three to nine employees and more than \$500,000 in annual revenue. These business leaders don't have the depth of experience to participate in

a roundtable for second-stagers, but need help with fundamentals and can benefit from peer learning.

In addition to a roundtable discussion, half of each PRESS session revolves around a presentation by a subject-matter expert. Topics can include: How to give feedback to employees, understanding temperament, creating structure, learning how to delegate, and beefing up your financial panache.

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