



Center for African American Recovery Development

RCO Toolkit

Resource 1.2

**Power, Presence & Pipeline –
Rethinking Leadership in Black
Recovery Spaces**



Black-led Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) model healing, leadership, and cultural power in motion. And yet, across the field, Black leaders are often under-supported, overexposed, and excluded from decision-making spaces—despite being the heartbeat of recovery in our communities.

This tool invites you to rethink how power is held, how presence is honored, and how leadership pipelines are built—with an unapologetically Black lens.

Section I: Presence Without Power

Too often, we're invited to the table only after it's already been set—asked to show up, but not to speak up.

Reflection Questions:

- Where does your leadership model come from? Who shaped it?
- How are Black leaders *seen and supported* in your organization—and how are they *heard*?
- What barriers still exist between lived experience and formal authority?

Action Steps:

- Review your org chart. Who holds power? Who holds trust?
 - Create space for feedback and truth-telling across positional lines.
 - Examine whether cultural fluency is *required* or just *welcomed*.
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Section II: Power as Cultural Practice

We define leadership through action, not just titles. In Black communities, power has always moved through influence, connection, and commitment to the collective.

Provocations:

- If your board had no titles, who would still lead?
- Who is considered “professional”? Who is considered “powerful”?
- How does your org define “qualified” for leadership roles?

Internal Work:

- Elevate cultural authority—elders, faith leaders, healers, and justice-impacted leaders.
 - Replace gatekeeping with mentorship.
 - Build power-sharing structures with clarity and accountability.
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Section III: Pipeline or Bottleneck?

The future of recovery leadership is Black, bold, and built on legacy. But too often, we replicate exclusion in how we train, select, and elevate leaders.

Self-Assessment: Is Your Pipeline Inclusive?

Statement	Yes	Needs Work	Not Yet Considered
We have a leadership development plan responsive to Black staff or community members	☐	☐	☐
Our succession planning includes cultural competency and equity	☐	☐	☐
Emerging leaders are given opportunities for visible, meaningful leadership	☐	☐	☐
Our training programs reflect the lived experiences of Black communities	☐	☐	☐

Section IV: Design a Culture-Centered Pipeline

Start with people. Build structures that don’t just include Black leaders—but are **shaped by them**.

Try This:

- Host a “Leadership Listening Session” with Black staff and community leaders.
- Map out non-traditional leadership pathways—peer mentors, neighborhood advocates, elders.
- Build bridges between formal leadership and cultural wisdom keepers.

Ask Yourself:

- What leadership has already emerged organically in your community?
 - What would it mean to define “professionalism” through a cultural lens?
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Section V: From Reflection to Reinvention

The goal isn’t diversity optics—it’s cultural alignment.

Culture-forward leadership development is not a checklist. It’s a practice of respect, rigor, and responsibility.

Use this guide as a starting point. Then go deeper.

Need more tools or technical assistance?

CAARD offers customized leadership intensives and strategic guidance for Black-led RCOs and allied organizations. Let’s build something real, together.

www.theCAARD.org