



Center for African American Recovery Development

RCO Toolkit

Resource 1.5

**Rooted & Ready:
A Self-Assessment Tool for
Culturally Grounded RCOs**



Rooted & Ready: A Self-Assessment Tool for Culturally Grounded RCOs

Created by CAARD to guide Black-led and culturally responsive Recovery Community Organizations toward deeper impact, alignment, and authenticity.

Why This Matters

Black-led RCOs are more than service providers—they are strategic sites of liberation, culture, and healing. But intention isn't enough. Culturally grounded organizations must reflect, respond, and be accountable to the communities they serve.

This tool offers structured self-assessment prompts and practical actions across four foundational principles outlined in Section 1 of the toolkit.

A Note on the Black Perspective:

The Black perspective doesn't just center the Black experience—it offers a lens for justice, repair, and dignity in any cultural context. Howard University's School of Social Work calls this "a global framework for understanding systems of oppression and building community-rooted care." These tools are designed for Black recovery spaces—but they are relevant and adaptable for any community-led organization striving toward equity and cultural integrity.

1. Culturally Congruent & Inclusive Recovery Practices

Framing Statement:

Cultural congruence means designing recovery spaces that reflect, respect, and respond to the values, languages, and lived experiences of the community served. Inclusion goes beyond visibility—it requires alignment.

Reflect & Act

1. Whose values are shaping your recovery services?

- *Action:* Reassess core program content through the lens of Black cultural values—faith, family structure, oral tradition, communal healing.

2. Are you translating dominant frameworks—or co-creating from within culture?

- *Action:* Invite community elders, healers, and peer leaders to co-create wellness models from within the community.

3. How do you integrate cultural rituals or traditions into everyday programming?

- *Action:* Incorporate storytelling, healing circles, music, movement, and spiritual anchoring.

4. Who defines “belonging” in your space?

- *Action:* Include feedback from LGBTQIA+ folks, disabled Black peers, neurodivergent voices, youth, elders and justice-impacted community members.

5. Are you creating space for healing that isn’t clinical?

- *Action:* Offer Afro-Indigenous practices, grief rituals, peer storytelling, and other culturally relevant non-clinical options.

2. Elevating Representation Across All Black Identities

Framing Statement:

Representation is not just about optics—it’s about power, leadership, and language. Black recovery must reflect the full diversity of Blackness across gender, orientation, disability, religion, neurotype, and lived experience.

Reflect & Act

1. Who is seen as a “credible messenger” in your organization?

- *Action:* Include non-traditional leaders—grandmothers, street scholars, reentry advocates, spiritual leaders.

2. Do your staff and board reflect diverse Black identities? Are you building your organization to support the full spectrum of Black life?

- *Action:* Map your team and your board’s demographic and experiential diversity. Set equity benchmarks for recruitment and retention. Provide regular equity trainings and include queer, disabled, neurodivergent, and justice-impacted facilitators.

3. Are you unconsciously reproducing white cultural norms of professionalism?

- *Action:* Redefine professionalism through a cultural lens that honors communal wisdom, relational leadership, and lived experience.

4. Are certain identities tokenized, excluded, or made to feel they must assimilate?

- *Action:* Create anonymous feedback opportunities and adjust policies to reflect intersectional inclusion.
-

3. Building Trust Through Cultural Competence & Community Accountability

Framing Statement:

Trust isn't earned by being nice—it's earned by being accountable. For Black communities harmed by institutional racism, transparency, participation, and repair are essential.

Reflect & Act

1. Is your organization designed to share power—or just to include feedback?

- *Action:* Establish participatory governance structures—community advisory boards, lived-experience board members with real voting power.

2. How do you acknowledge and respond to harm?

- *Action:* Create clear harm repair protocols with community involvement.

3. Are your funding and hiring practices aligned with equity goals?

- *Action:* Allocate resources to culturally grounded, Black-led providers and peer-led initiatives.

4. Are you publicly transparent about your outcomes and challenges?

- *Action:* Share quarterly impact data, budget use, and equity benchmarks.

5. How regularly do you invite (and respond to) community feedback?

- *Action:* Host quarterly listening sessions and publish results and resulting actions.

4. Ensuring Recovery Pathways That Reflect All Black Realities

Framing Statement:

Black healing doesn't follow a single path. An inclusive RCO honors abstinence, harm reduction, medication-assisted treatment, spiritual healing, and hybrid models—with equal respect.

Reflect & Act

1. How does your RCO define “recovery”? Who gets to decide?

- *Action:* Co-create a definition of recovery with your community—not just your staff.

2. Are harm reduction and MAT treated as valid or as fallback options?

- *Action:* Normalize and promote these as primary pathways, led by Black practitioners and peers.

3. Are your peer staff trained to support multiple pathways?

- *Action:* Integrate education on SMART Recovery, Refuge Recovery, Moderation Management, Afro-Indigenous modalities, etc.

4. Are you offering healing options for those who don't relate to clinical or 12-step models?

- *Action:* Build programming around spiritual, cultural, or body-based healing that feels accessible and dignified.

5. Is your RCO aligned with public health strategies that support liberation, not criminalization?

- *Action:* Partner with Black-led harm reduction networks and organizations advocating for decriminalization and public health.

Want to Go Deeper? Partner with CAARD.

This guide is a starting point, not a finish line. The Center for African American Recovery Development offers deeper technical assistance, leadership development, and strategic training for RCOs and institutions seeking to build in community harmony from the ground up.

Learn more at: www.theecaard.org