



Center for African American Recovery Development

RCO Toolkit

Resource 3.4

Nonprofit Registration Checklist



Nonprofit Registration Checklist

Registering as a Nonprofit & Obtaining 501(c)(3) Status

Structured for Black-Led Recovery Community Organizations

Overview

Establishing legal nonprofit status is a critical milestone for Black-led RCOs seeking to grow sustainable, community-rooted recovery infrastructure. Securing 501(c)(3) status not only legitimizes your organization—it opens doors to funding, partnerships, and long-term impact. But this process can be daunting, especially for Black leaders navigating historically exclusionary systems.

This step-by-step checklist offers a streamlined, accessible guide designed to support Black-led RCOs through each stage of nonprofit formation. If you're just starting out—or if you're looking to strengthen your foundation—this tool will help ensure you meet compliance standards and build with intention.

Note: In communities where formal institutions have failed us, legitimacy comes from the people. Legal status helps open doors, but cultural accountability will keep your RCO rooted.

Nonprofit Registration Checklist

1. Incorporate Your Organization

- File Articles of Incorporation with your state's Secretary of State.
- Use nonprofit-specific language required for 501(c)(3) eligibility.

2. Develop a Governing Structure

- Draft and approve bylaws.
- Appoint a Board of Directors (see Governance guide for culturally responsive leadership).
- Hold your first board meeting and document minutes.

3. Apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN)

- Submit IRS Form SS-4 to obtain an EIN.
- Required for taxes, banking, and payroll.

4. Prepare and Submit IRS Form 1023 or 1023-EZ

- Choose your form based on organizational size and complexity.
- Include your mission, activities, and budget data.
- Pay IRS filing fee.

5. Register with State Charity Officials

- Check with your state Attorney General or Department of Charities for donation-solicitation requirements.

6. Create a Record-Keeping & Compliance System

- Track income, expenses, grant records, and board meeting minutes.
- Prepare for annual IRS Form 990 filings and state-specific reporting.

7. Open a Bank Account

- Use your EIN and Articles of Incorporation.
- Establish clear financial policies and internal controls.

8. Begin Building Infrastructure

- Develop branding, marketing, and your digital presence.
- Start building relationships and preparing for fundraising.

Tips for Success

- **Lean into community knowledge:** Local elders, Black professionals, and peer leaders are invaluable advisors.
 - **Get support:** Partner with a nonprofit consultant or legal clinic if needed.
 - **Document everything:** Store your records securely and back them up.
 - **Know your deadlines:** Keep track of your compliance dates and filing windows.
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Need Help Navigating This Process?

CAARD offers tailored support to help Black-led RCOs move from vision to legal recognition. From incorporating your organization to building systems of accountability, we can walk alongside you every step of the way.

Contact us at: theecaard@gmail.com

Visit: www.thecaard.org