



Center for African American Recovery Development

CAARD RCO Toolkit Rooted & Ready

Version 1.0

Rooted in Culture, Rising in Power: Building the Black Recovery Movement

At the heart of **CAARD's** mission is a coalition of Black-led organizations redefining recovery through culturally responsive, community-driven solutions. This toolkit equips leaders, advocates, and organizations with the strategies and tools to build, strengthen, and sustain culturally congruent Recovery Community Organizations



Section II: Core Strategies Of Culturally Responsive RCOs

Beyond Awareness: Building Power, Shaping Policy, and Sustaining Impact

From Awareness to Action

To move from recognition to repair, we must equip Black-led RCOs with the strategies, infrastructure, and influence to lead a new era of recovery—rooted in justice, driven by culture, and designed for sustainability.

Black-led RCOs are service providers, organizing hubs, policy influencers, and protectors of Black healing spaces. They are the bridge between recovery and healing justice, ensuring that our voices are heard, our communities are served, and our leadership is sustained.

Black-led Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) are more than service providers. They are organizing hubs, cultural anchors, policy influencers, and protectors of healing spaces. They are the living infrastructure of Black recovery, bridging personal healing and collective transformation.

To truly meet the needs of our communities, we need RCOs that not only survive—but lead. This means equipping Black-led organizations with tools to shift narratives, build internal strength, drive policy change, and expand healing models beyond outdated, abstinence-only frameworks. These organizations must act strategically—moving from reactive programming to visionary leadership that transforms recovery for generations to come.

This section outlines the core strategies that Black-led RCOs must implement to sustain real change, not just survival:

- Public Education & Narrative Change – Redefining how Black communities understand recovery.
- Technical Training & Capacity Building – Strengthening leadership, financial sustainability, and infrastructure.
- Policy Advocacy & Legislative Engagement – Ensuring Black recovery voices influence laws and funding.
- Harm Reduction, MAT, and Alternative Recovery Support Models – Taking action to expand recovery beyond abstinence-only frameworks.

Each of these strategies builds directly on the core principles from Section I—ensuring that culturally responsive RCOs are not only grounded in values, but moving those values into real-time systems of care, voice, and visibility.

1. Public Education & Narrative Change

Reclaiming the Language & Narrative of Black Healing

Why This Matters:

- Black communities often reject mainstream recovery messaging because it is Eurocentric, stigmatizing, and disconnected from Black lived experience.
- Words like "addict," "alcoholic," and even "recovery" carry historical baggage and fail to reflect the holistic healing journey many Black people experience.
- The media has shaped a harmful narrative: when addiction impacts white communities, it's a "public health crisis;" when it impacts Black communities, it's "criminal behavior."

Strategies for Changing the Narrative:

- Use culturally affirming language → Say "restoring balance," "reclaiming wellness," or "getting free" instead of using clinical, stigmatized terms.
- Engage Black-owned media, influencers, and cultural spaces → Black radio, podcasts, barbershops, and faith spaces should be primary channels for recovery conversations.
- Create multimedia storytelling campaigns → Amplify real Black recovery stories that emphasize resilience, community, and multiple pathways to healing.
- Challenge internalized stigma → Host forums and listening sessions that unpack generational trauma and language around substance use.

Downloadable 2.1: Black Recovery Messaging Toolkit

2. Technical Training & Capacity Building

Strengthening Black-Led RCOs for Long-Term Impact

Why This Matters:

- Many Black-led RCOs operate with limited funding, lack of infrastructure, and overworked leadership—leading to burnout and short-lived initiatives.
- Funders often prioritize white-led organizations, making it critical for Black RCOs to develop strong financial and operational models to sustain themselves.
- Without training in grant writing, board development, and financial sustainability, Black-led RCOs struggle to compete for resources.

Strategies for Strengthening Capacity:

- Develop Strong Leadership Pipelines → Train the next generation of Black recovery leaders to avoid reliance on a single figurehead.
 - Build Financial Sustainability → Diversify funding through grants, fee-for-service models, corporate sponsorships, and grassroots donations.
 - Strengthen Operational Infrastructure → Implement data tracking, HR policies, and digital management systems to increase efficiency.
 - Ensure Leadership Reflects the Full Black Experience → Develop mentorship and leadership pathways for Black LGBTQIA2S+, youth, disabled, and justice-involved leaders.
 - Build internal governance skills → Support your board with legal literacy, fiduciary training, and cultural alignment.
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Downloadable Resource 2.2: Strategic Planning & Sustainability Framework for RCOs

3. Policy Advocacy & Legislative Engagement

Black Recovery Must Be a Political Priority

Why This Matters:

- Policies determine who gets treatment and who gets jail time—and for Black people, that distinction is too often stacked against us.
- Black-led recovery programs receive less funding and fewer policy protections than white-led programs.
- Black voices are often excluded from decision-making on recovery-related laws and funding distribution.

Strategies for Advocacy & Engagement:

- Push for Equitable Recovery Funding → Advocate for set-asides in federal and state grants for Black-led RCOs.
- Build Relationships with Policymakers → Train Black recovery leaders to engage with elected officials, legislative committees, and government agencies.
- Host Community Advocacy Days → Organize town halls, legislative briefings, and Black-led policy forums to push for change.
- Educate Black Communities on Policy Impact → Teach individuals about harm reduction policies, decriminalization, and healthcare equity.
- Track local policy trends → RCOs should monitor shifts in city, county, and state-level decisions around behavioral health funding.

Downloadable Resource 2.3: Legislative Advocacy Toolkit for Black-Led RCOs

4. Harm Reduction, MAT, and Alternative Recovery Support Models

Embracing All Pathways to Healing

Why This Matters:

- Black communities have high overdose rates but low access to harm reduction services due to stigma, funding gaps, and criminalization.
- Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) is underutilized by Black people due to medical distrust and a lack of Black-led MAT providers.
- Abstinence-only models alienate many Black individuals who need alternative approaches to healing.

Strategies for Expanding Recovery Models:

- Normalize Harm Reduction in Black Recovery Spaces → Educate the community on Narcan use, syringe exchange programs, and safe-use practices.
- Advocate for MAT Access in Black Communities → Increase Black-led clinics and MAT providers and dismantle the stigma surrounding Suboxone and Methadone.
- Offer Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Recovery Spaces → Create programs that address racial trauma, poverty, and systemic oppression as barriers to healing.
- Integrate Afrocentric Healing Practices → Use spirituality, movement, and cultural traditions as central tools in Black-led recovery models.

- Expand legitimacy of diverse models → Ensure RCOs include SMART Recovery, Moderation Management, Refuge Recovery, Indigenous and reentry-based models as valid and supported paths.

Downloadable Resource: See Downloadable Resource 1.4: Culture, Care & Choice: Harm Reduction Strategies for Black Recovery Spaces for detailed harm reduction strategies tailored to Black-led RCOs.

Final Thoughts: This Is the Future of Black Recovery

For Black-led RCOs to be effective and sustainable, we must:

- Take control of the recovery narrative—using language and messaging that resonate with our people.
- Strengthen infrastructure and leadership pipelines—ensuring long-term sustainability.
- Engage in policy advocacy—so that Black recovery isn't an afterthought in legislative decisions.
- Embrace harm reduction, MAT, and holistic healing—ensuring that all recovery pathways are respected and available.

Next Steps:

Download the CAARD RCO Toolkit Action Plan to begin implementing these strategies in your organization. Principles only matter if we build systems that reflect them.