

National Standards of Best Practices for Recovery Community Organizations

RCO Definition

A **recovery community organization (RCO)** is an independent, non-profit organization led and governed by representatives of local communities of recovery that does any, one, or combination of the following activities. These activities are available to all community members and are not restricted to individuals enrolled in a specific educational, treatment, or residential program.

- conduct ongoing local recovery support needs assessment surveys or focus groups
- organize recovery-focused policy and advocacy activities
- increase recovery workforce capacity and expertise through training and education
- carry out recovery-focused outreach programs to engage people seeking recovery, in recovery, or in need of recovery-focused support services or events to educate and raise public awareness
- conduct recovery-focused public and professional education events
- provide peer recovery support services (PRSS)
- support the development of recovery support institutions (e.g., education-based recovery support programs, recovery community centers, recovery cafes, recovery ministries, recovery-focused employment programs, recovery-focused prison reentry programs, etc.)
- host local, regional, or national recovery celebration events
- collaborate on the integration of recovery-focused activities within local prevention, harm reduction, early intervention, and treatment initiatives

10 Best Practices for Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs)

To ensure fidelity to the recovery community organization model, Faces & Voices of Recovery, RCOs across the nation, and stakeholders have identified the following as national best practices for recovery community organizations.

GOVERNANCE:

1. Non-profit Organization

The organization is a non-profit with a current 501c3 status. In some cases, a recovery community organization will have a fiscal agent where a fiduciary relationship exists between an RCO and another agency. In these instances, the role of the fiduciary agent is limited to managing assets and distributing funds to the recovery community organization, free from conflicting self-interests, for the purpose of supporting the recovery community organization's mission. The recovery community organization is autonomous in their decision-making, program development, recovery services provided, and advocacy efforts through the leadership of an executive or advisory board.

2. Led and Governed by the Recovery Community

The organization is peer-led. More than 50% of the Board of Directors or Advisory Board self-identify as people in personal recovery from their own substance use disorders. Additional board members may include family members of persons impacted by substance use disorders and recovery, allies, and persons with co-occurring mental health disorders.

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

3. **Primary Focus is Recovery from Substance Use Disorders**

The organization's mission and vision include a primary focus on recovery from substance use disorders. Some organizations also provide ancillary activities such as prevention services, housing, other addictions, and/or mental health peer services. However, the primary function of an RCO is focused on recovery from substance use disorders and related problems.

4. **Grassroots**

Community engagement is grassroots and reflective of the community served. The organization provides recovery supportive opportunities to the broader community for all community members to get involved in. This may include volunteering; participating in activities; and planning outreach, events, and programs. Examples of ways to engage local communities of recovery are visible on the website and evident in program delivery.

5. **Participatory Processes**

The organization has accountability to the recovery community through processes that promote involvement, engagement, and consultation of people in recovery, their families, friends, and recovery allies. These processes may include town hall meetings, listening sessions, surveys, committees, task forces, and volunteer opportunities. Participatory Processes (PP) are specific methods employed to achieve active participation by all members of a group in priority setting and decision-making processes.

6. **Peer Recovery Support Services**

RCOs provide primarily non-clinical, peer recovery support services. Some examples of non-clinical services are recovery support groups, recovery coaching, telephone recovery support, skill-building groups, harm-reduction activities, and other events. In resource-scarce communities, RCOs sometimes offer clinical services to better meet the needs of their community.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:

7. All Pathways Towards Recovery

The organization supports, allows for, and may provide opportunities for all pathways towards recovery and does not exclude anyone based on their chosen pathway. This includes support for harm reduction strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with substance use and improving health and wellness for people who use drugs and/or alcohol.

8. Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Policies, Practices, and Services

The organization is purposeful in their board and staff development activities, organizational practices, service offerings, and advocacy efforts to meet the diverse needs of underrepresented populations in the communities that they serve. All communities have groups of people who experience marginalization who are deserving of inclusion. RCOs develop and enact culturally informed plans to diminish inequity in the implementation of their outreach and services.

9. Recovery-Friendly Language

RCO websites, materials, and other online platforms use language that is supportive of and promotes recovery across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. Organizations regularly conduct reviews on their literature and online content. This resource, [Words Matter: How Language Choice Can Reduce Stigma](#), will aid in such a review.

10. Code of Ethics and Grievance Policies

The organization has an employee and volunteer code of ethics in place, and easily accessible grievance procedures, to protect service recipients and stakeholders engaged with the organization. Physical locations may post these policies and procedures in a common area. Organizations without physical locations may post these on their website. The code of ethics reflects core recovery values and is crafted specifically for the RCO and its service roles rather than arbitrarily applying a code of ethics for clinical services to the RCO context.

