



Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant,  
and Substance Use Program

# Recovery Community Organizations Toolkit

December 2024

## Introduction

Recovery community organizations (RCOs) are at the forefront of supporting individuals on their journeys to recovery from substance use disorders (SUDs). These nonprofit organizations, led by individuals in recovery, provide crucial services such as advocacy, education, and peer support. This resource explores the various roles that RCOs play, how they collaborate with other service providers, and their impact on the recovery ecosystem.

Whether you are a health care provider, a criminal justice professional, or a community leader, understanding how to work with RCOs can enhance your support for individuals in recovery. Join us as we delve into the essential functions of RCOs and how you can partner with them to create a more supportive and effective recovery network.

## What Is an RCO?

RCOs are nonprofit organizations led and governed by individuals in recovery. They focus on making the recovery community more visible and influential through policy advocacy, community education, and peer recovery support services.

## What Do RCOs Do?

RCOs support people in recovery by:

- Assessing local recovery support needs.
- Advocating for recovery-focused policies.
- Training and educating the recovery workforce.
- Conducting outreach programs to support and engage individuals in recovery.
- Hosting public education events.
- Offering peer recovery support services (PRSS).
- Developing recovery support institutions like recovery community centers and employment programs.
- Celebrating recovery with local, regional, or national events.
- Collaborating on prevention, harm reduction, early intervention, and treatment initiatives.

RCOs provide nonclinical, peer-led services and programs. It is crucial to the mission and integrity of the RCO that its services remain within this scope.

## National Standards for RCOs

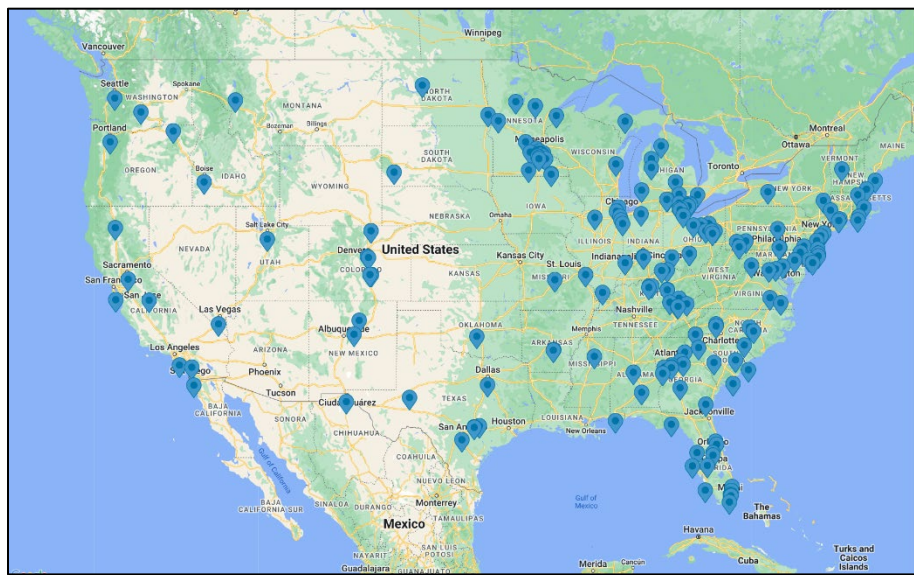
Ten best practices and standards ensure fidelity to the RCO model, as follows:

1. Nonprofit organization
2. Led and governed by the recovery community
3. Primary focus is recovery from SUDs
4. Grassroots
5. Participatory process
6. PRSS
7. All pathways towards recovery
8. Diverse, equitable, and inclusive policies, practices, and services
9. Recovery-friendly language
10. Code of ethics and grievance policies

For additional information on these standards, visit [this](#) page on the Faces and Voices of Recovery website.

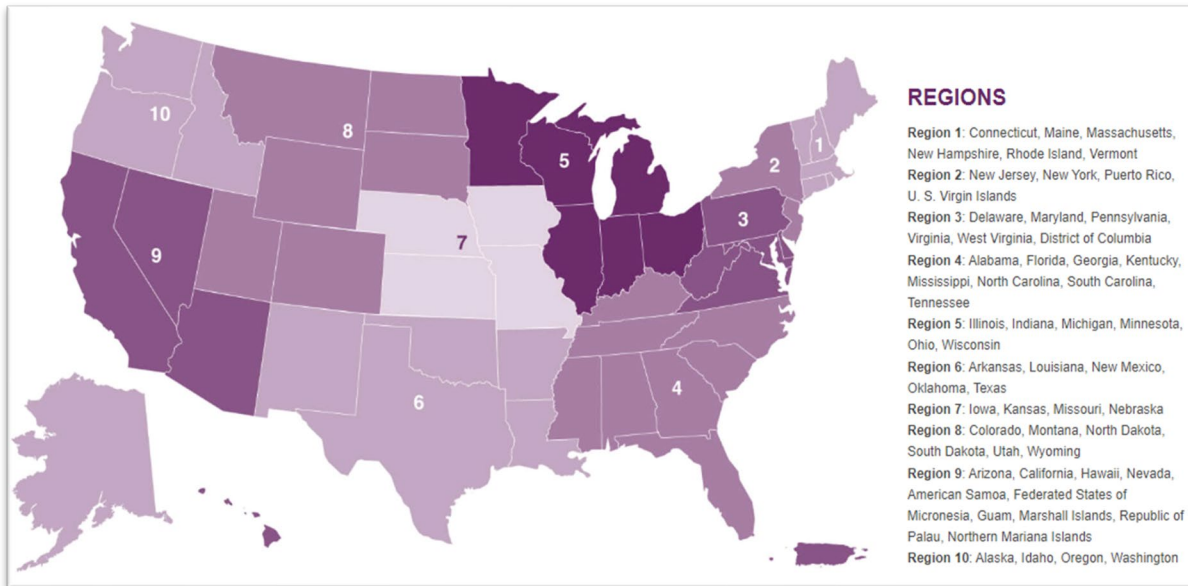
## How to Locate an RCO

RCOs can be found across the country. There may be an RCO in your area. To assist in identifying RCOs near or within your state or jurisdiction, several organizations have listings and resource maps available, such as the one found below.



RCO Map, Faces and Voices of Recovery

The Peer Recovery Center of Excellence also has a map of RCO locations, which can be accessed through its [website](#).



**RCO Map, Peer Recovery Center of Excellence**

Other ways to identify RCOs in your area may include reaching out to your state’s behavioral health authority for more information. Networking with local treatment agencies, quick response teams, peer recovery support specialists, and others within your community who are involved in prevention, treatment, and recovery may provide valuable connections as well. Many states have their own websites and directories dedicated to tracking RCOs. In addition, many RCO staff members attend conferences and professional events where they can connect with others in the field.

## Coordinated Care Models

Coordinated care models address the needs of individuals in recovery by integrating the delivery of physical health, behavioral health, and social support services. RCOs, along with their peer recovery support specialists, play a vital role in these models, offering guidance and connecting people to essential resources.

### Key Components

- 1. Information sharing:** Ensures a comprehensive understanding of an individual's needs.
- 2. Resource collaboration:** Pools resources and expertise to provide a wider range of services.
- 3. Care coordination:** Peer recovery support specialists help meet needs across health care, housing, employment, and social support.

### Action Steps for Providers

1. Establish information sharing protocols with RCOs to ensure a comprehensive understanding of individuals' needs.
2. Develop coordinated care plans that include RCOs to leverage their unique expertise and resources.

**Example 1:** In a local community, RCOs and behavioral health providers work together to conduct trauma-informed assessments, addressing both SUDs and mental health conditions.

**Example 2:** RCOs collaborate with behavioral health clinics to integrate peer recovery specialists into clinical settings, providing ongoing support and advocacy.

## Joint Training Programs

Joint training programs for RCOs and behavioral health organizations enhance collaboration and promote a shared approach to recovery support.

### Benefits

- Encourage mutual understanding and effective communication.
- Provide opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange.
- Develop practical skills essential for recovery support.

### Action Steps for Providers

1. Develop joint training programs with RCOs to foster mutual understanding and effective communication.
2. Include RCO staff members in training sessions to share their lived experiences and practical insights.

**Example 1:** A behavioral health provider, a hospital, and an RCO host a training session on stigma where someone in recovery shares their experiences, cultivating understanding.

**Example 2:** RCOs and behavioral health organizations hold joint training sessions on trauma-informed care and harm reduction, enhancing collaboration.

## Joint Advocacy Efforts

Collaborating on advocacy efforts strengthens the recovery support ecosystem and ensures sustainable resources for RCOs and their partners.

### Benefits

- Joint advocacy efforts form a unified voice to engage policymakers and stakeholders.
- Access to each other's resources strengthens influence on policy.
- Joint proposals cultivate comprehensive frameworks to address recovery needs.

### Action Steps for Providers

1. Collaborate with RCOs on advocacy initiatives to present a unified voice to policymakers.
2. Pool resources and expertise with RCOs to develop comprehensive, evidence-based policy proposals.

**Example 1:** An RCO partners with health care providers and jails to support reentry programs and create medication-assisted treatment recovery programs in jail, building a resilient support system.

**Example 2:** RCOs collaborate with social service organizations to advocate for policies that support housing and employment opportunities for individuals in recovery.

## Policy Development

People in recovery interact with many systems, including RCOs, health care providers, the criminal justice system, and social services. Partnering with these providers helps RCOs advocate for policies that improve lives.

### Key Areas

- Insurance coverage equality
- Expansion of recovery treatment options
- Training for health care providers on stigma and substance use challenges
- Employment equity and nondiscriminatory hiring practices
- Access to education and housing for those in recovery
- Public education and awareness campaigns

### Action Steps for Providers

1. Partner with RCOs to identify common policy goals and develop coordinated advocacy frameworks.
2. Support RCO-led initiatives that promote equitable access to treatment, housing, and employment for individuals in recovery.

**Example 1:** By participating in policy meetings at a family recovery court, an RCO advocated for house arrest instead of incarceration to keep families together.

**Example 2:** RCOs work with local government agencies to secure funding for recovery community centers and housing programs for individuals in recovery.



## Collaboration With the Legal System

RCOs bridge the gap between individuals in recovery and the criminal justice system, ensuring that they get the support needed to maintain recovery, reduce recidivism, and reintegrate into society.

### Key Areas

#### 1. Reentry Programs

- **Peer support:** Offers guidance and support during the transition from incarceration to integration within the community.
- **Continuity of care:** Connects individuals with community-based services before release.

#### 2. Diversion Programs

- **Treatment over incarceration:** Advocates for programs that prioritize treatment over incarceration.
- **Support and advocacy:** Involve peer support specialists in the court process.

#### 3. Training and Education

- **Legal system training:** Provides training on addiction, recovery, and recovery-oriented approaches.
- **Cultural competency:** Enhances mutual understanding through joint training sessions.

#### 4. Policy Advocacy

- **Reform initiatives:** Advocate for policies supporting treatment and recovery over punitive measures.
- **Collaborative policy development:** Ensures that recovery needs are represented in policy development.

**Example 1:** RCOs collaborate with correctional facilities to provide peer support services to individuals transitioning back into the community.

**Example 2:** RCOs work with drug/recovery courts to offer treatment and recovery support as alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders.

### Action Steps for Providers

1. Partner with RCOs to develop reentry programs that provide comprehensive support for individuals transitioning from incarceration to integration within the community.
2. Collaborate with RCOs on diversion programs that prioritize treatment and recovery over punitive measures.

## Conclusion

RCOs are crucial allies in supporting individuals in recovery and creating compassionate criminal justice systems. Through collaboration in reentry programs, diversion initiatives, training, and policy advocacy, RCOs help transform the criminal justice system into a supportive environment for those struggling with SUDs.

Strong partnerships between RCOs and justice system stakeholders ensure comprehensive support for individuals impacted by the legal system, benefiting them, their families, and the broader community. Together, we can break the cycle of addiction and incarceration, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

Visit the COSSUP Resource Center at [www.cossup.org](http://www.cossup.org).

### About BJA

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provides leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal law enforcement in achieving safer communities. To learn more about BJA, visit [www.bja.gov](http://www.bja.gov) and follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/DOJBJA](https://www.facebook.com/DOJBJA)) and X (formerly known as Twitter) (@DOJBJA). BJA is part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.

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