FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

Defining Statewide Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs): Strengthening Recovery Infrastructure

Introduction & Purpose

This document provides a comprehensive definition of Statewide Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs), clarifies their relationship with local RCOs, other statewide RCOs, and Faces & Voices of Recovery, and outlines their distinct and complementary roles within the recovery ecosystem. Its purpose is to guide policymakers, stakeholders, and recovery leaders in understanding how Statewide RCOs serve as the unified voice for recovery across an entire state, advancing recovery-oriented policy, systems, and practices.

By mapping functions, relationships, and alignment, this resource supports the development of robust recovery infrastructure and highlights the importance of collaboration, equity, and capacity building. It is intended to foster clarity, partnership, and effectiveness among recovery organizations at all levels.

Recovery Community Organization (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

FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

DEFINING STATEWIDE RCOS; THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL RCOS, OTHER STATEWIDE RCOS, AND FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

Statutory-Ready Definition: Statewide Recovery Community Organization

"Statewide Recovery Community Organization" or "Statewide RCO" means an independent, peer-led nonprofit organization that represents and organizes the recovery community across an entire state. A Statewide RCO serves as the unified voice for individuals, families, and communities impacted by substance use conditions and has a primary mission to advance recovery-oriented policy, systems, and practices.

A Statewide RCO shall:

1. Conduct statewide advocacy, public education, and stigma reduction efforts related to substance use recovery;
2. Engage with state agencies, the legislature, and other stakeholders to inform policy and system-level decision-making affecting recovery;
3. Build and support statewide recovery infrastructure, including by strengthening, coordinating, and providing capacity-building assistance to local and regional recovery community organizations.
4. Promote equity, inclusion, and meaningful engagement of communities disproportionately impacted by substance use conditions and related systems; and
5. Operate independently of treatment providers while collaborating across prevention, treatment, recovery support, housing, and other relevant systems.

A Statewide RCO may provide training, technical assistance, and coordination services but does not function as a clinical treatment provider.

Optional Short Form (If Needed for a Definitions Section)

"Statewide Recovery Community Organization" or "Statewide RCO" means a peer-led nonprofit organization that serves as the statewide organizing and advocacy body for the recovery community, providing leadership in policy engagement, public education, equity-focused advocacy, and capacity building for local recovery community organizations.

FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

Functional Mapping: Statewide RCOs vs. Local RCOs

Function Area	Statewide RCOs – What They Do	Local RCOs – What They Do
Primary Role	Serve as the **unified, organizing voice of recovery across the state** and the backbone entity for policy and systems engagement	Serve as the **community-based face of recovery**, meeting immediate needs of people and families at the local level
Advocacy & Policy	Lead **state-level legislative, regulatory, and systems advocacy**; build and coordinate policy agendas; represent recovery in statewide decision-making bodies	Engage in **local advocacy**, community education, and relationship-building with local officials and partners
Relationship with SSA & State Systems	Act as the **primary point of engagement** between the recovery community and state agencies (SSA, behavioral health authorities, executive offices	Participate in state initiatives primarily **through the infrastructure and coordination of the statewide RCO**
Infrastructure Building	**Build, coordinate, and sustain statewide recovery infrastructure**, including networks of local RCOs; may hold statewide contracts or line items	Operate **within local infrastructure**, often relying on support, coordination, or funding passed through statewide mechanisms
Capacity Building & Technical Assistance	Provide or coordinate **training, technical assistance, mentorship, and capacity building** for emerging and established local RCOs	Receive capacity-building support and apply it to **local service delivery, governance, and sustainability**
Funding Role	Seek, manage, and/or distribute **statewide funding**, mini-grants, or contracts to support local RCO growth and equity	Utilize funding to support **direct recovery support activities** and local advocacy, often with statewide guidance or requirements
Public Education & Awareness	Lead **statewide public awareness efforts** (e.g., Recovery Month, legislative days, stigma reduction campaigns	Implement and adapt awareness efforts at the **community level**, engaging local media and partners
Equity & Inclusion	Set **statewide equity priorities**, lead intentional engagement of disproportionately impacted	Conduct **direct, relationship-based engagement**

Function Area	Statewide RCOs – What They Do	Local RCOs – What They Do
	communities, and align DEI efforts across the state	with underrepresented communities at the local level
Direct Services	May offer training or coordination as well **as direct service providers**	Often focus primarily on **direct recovery support services** (peer support, recovery community centers, navigation, outreach)

Plain-Language Summary (Useful for Policymakers & SSAs

- **Statewide RCOs organize the system.**
- **Local RCOs serve the community.**

Statewide RCOs focus on **policy, infrastructure, coordination, and advocacy at scale**, while local RCOs focus on **direct engagement, support, and services where people live**. The two are **interdependent—not competitive**—and function most effectively when roles are clearly defined and aligned

Optional Insert for Statute, Guidance, or Contracts
Statewide Recovery Community Organizations and Local Recovery Community Organizations perform distinct and complementary functions. Statewide RCOs are responsible for statewide advocacy, infrastructure development, and coordination with state systems, while local RCOs focus on community-based recovery support, outreach, and local advocacy.

Relationship and Alignment Across the Recovery Infrastructure

Relationship Among Statewide Recovery Community Organizations (Regional & Cross-State)

Statewide Recovery Community Organizations operate independently within their respective states while maintaining collaborative relationships with other Statewide RCOs regionally and nationally. These relationships are characterized by shared learning, coordination, and mutual support rather than competition.
Statewide RCOs may:

- Participate in regional and national peer learning exchanges with other Statewide RCOs to share best practices in advocacy, capacity building, equity, and systems engagement.
- Coordinate multi-state or regional policy strategies on issues affecting recovery, including federal policy, public awareness campaigns, and systems transformation.
- Provide mentorship and technical guidance to emerging Statewide RCOs in other states; and
- Align messaging and priorities to strengthen the collective impact and visibility of the recovery movement across geographic regions.

These relationships recognize that while recovery needs vary by state, Statewide RCOs benefit from intentional collaboration and consistency in defining their role, value, and function within state and federal systems.

FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

Relationship Between Statewide RCOs and the National Recovery Infrastructure *(Faces & Voices of Recovery)*

Statewide Recovery Community Organizations are a critical component of the national recovery infrastructure and maintain a collaborative, bidirectional relationship with Faces & Voices of Recovery as the national recovery advocacy organization.
Within this relationship:

- Statewide RCOs provide on-the-ground insight, lived experience perspectives, and state-level intelligence that inform national policy positions, federal advocacy, and field-wide standards;
- Faces & Voices of Recovery serves as a national convener, amplifier, and connector, elevating the collective voice of Statewide RCOs in federal policy discussions, public education efforts, and cross-state initiatives;
- Faces & Voices of Recovery supports Statewide RCOs through technical assistance, national advocacy coordination, shared frameworks, and convening space, while respecting the autonomy and authority of Statewide RCOs within their states; and
- Statewide RCOs align with Faces & Voices of Recovery to advance shared values, principles, and recovery-oriented policy goals, while tailoring implementation to state-specific contexts.

This relationship is grounded in partnership rather than hierarchy, with a shared purpose of strengthening recovery-oriented systems, advancing equity, and ensuring that the voices of people in recovery shape policy and practice at all levels.

Optional Statute or Guidance Insert (Concise)
Statewide Recovery Community Organizations collaborate with other Statewide RCOs across regions and with national recovery organizations, including Faces & Voices of Recovery, to align advocacy efforts, share best practices, and strengthen recovery-oriented policy and systems at the state and national levels.