

Preamble.

It is important to acknowledge that this document intentionally and unambiguously addresses the needs of Black and Indigenous communities. We understand that there are other marginalized groups that we have harmed; we recognize that this work cannot be completed in a single document. Each group has been harmed uniquely and will require different solutions that promote healing, equity, and justice. To blanket all groups under one approach would be to ignore their individual needs, strengths, and distinct experiences. We understand that taking a one-size-fits-all approach would be disrespectful and could generate further harm. We have piloted this project by first highlighting the needs of Black and Indigenous peoples. We are committed to making a more just community for all people in recovery. We look forward to future collaborations to meet our commitments to Black and Indigenous people in recovery, and to build initiatives for additional marginalized communities.

The work continues.

North Starⁱ Guide for Recovery Leaders June 19, 2021

Introduction and Invitation

Over the years, many Black and Indigenousⁱⁱ community members have attempted to hold recovery organization and recovery advocacy community leaders accountable by pointing out the lack of inclusivity and representation and overt acts that promoted marginalization. In some cases, organizations met these criticisms with vague promises of “doing better” or changing, but little effective change occurred. As 2020 was a year of upheaval on many fronts, it also served as a catalyst to refocus national attention on racial injustice, and specifically the history and contemporary legacy of anti-Black racism in America in addition to the multitude of white-dominant, racist, and discriminatory practices that block access to essential, lifesaving services and supports. In response, the founding members of this groupⁱⁱⁱ decided to attempt systemic changes within our respective organizations. We acknowledge the importance of directly addressing anti-Black racism in recovery, as an essential starting point for equity. This document is a reflection of our commitments, and we invite you to join us and hold us accountable in this process.

The modern recovery advocacy movement took shape around 2001 and primarily evolved within white-dominant structures, systems, and beliefs^{iv} that perpetuate racial inequities within the recovery continuum. We recognize a deficit of Black and Indigenous voices and leaders within our agencies and acknowledge participating in racist practices that have directly contributed to this problem. Lack of representation at the national level among our organizations emerges from and reinforces the systems that prevent equitable opportunities to participate in recovery. Black and Indigenous people often experience disparate, inequitable, and punitive pathways to recovery. We acknowledge that our organizations have directly contributed to and participated in anti-Black racist actions that have harmed Black members of the recovery movement and have led to inequitable access to leadership roles, and ultimately, inequitable access to recovery support services promoted by our organizations.

As leaders in the recovery advocacy community, we also recognize that not all who seek recovery have equitable access to their choice of treatment and recovery supports. We acknowledge that we have not supported all pathways to recovery, and we need to focus our influence to address equitable access to recovery supports and multiple pathways, while also addressing anti-Black racism within national standards, policies, and practices. To build a more just recovery community, we must examine the deeply rooted structures, systems, and beliefs of white supremacy; implement anti-

racist practices within our agencies strategically, adjusting to suit the needs of each organization; and shift our priorities toward racial equity.

Addressing Anti-Black Racism in Recovery North Star

We, Association of Alternative Peer Groups, Association of Recovery Schools, Faces & Voices of Recovery, and Young People in Recovery, acknowledge that racism is deeply rooted in structures, systems, organizations, and communities, and individuals, and we unequivocally condemn all forms of racism and commit to effecting change.

We have developed this Addressing Anti-Black Racism in Recovery North Star document to hold ourselves accountable, and we will work collectively and individually to dismantle systemic racism and white supremacy within recovery agencies, programs, policies, systems, and settings. We know that structures within recovery communities must be reformed, updated, or removed to ensure equitable representation of Black and Indigenous members in the recovery movement, and to ensure equitable access to recovery and well-being.

Our Commitments

Representation and Culture Shift

- We commit to elevating the individual and collective voices of all those who experience anti-Black racism.
- We commit to our designated organizations' recruitment and internal restructuring to ensure representation of Black and Indigenous people in our executive leadership, mid-level management, and Board positions.
- We commit to taking actionable steps to name and address cultural imperialism^v within our organizations.
- We commit to addressing the underlying problems with a lack of equitable access for Black and Indigenous community members, leading to a lack of representation.
- We commit to uplifting and centering the lived experiences and resilience of individuals, families, and communities that we serve.
- We commit to critically increasing our knowledge of how racism impacts access to quality recovery support services for communities experiencing systemic oppression.
- We commit to supporting organizational policies and practices that promote individual agency in choosing services, including the freedom to choose what context services are delivered and access to culturally informed recovery support services and resources.
- We commit to transitioning from additive racial equity work to weaving equitable and anti-oppressive practices throughout our entire organizations.

Advocacy

- We commit to a social and racial justice agenda, including opposition to forced treatment and criminalization that have caused harm and trauma to Black and Indigenous communities, such as the War on Drugs and “Zero-Tolerance^{vi}” school policies that funnel students of color into the criminal legal system.

- We commit to supporting all pathways to recovery and advocating for equitable access to one's pathway of choice.
- We commit to using our influence over national standards to promote policies that ensure that all who seek recovery have equitable access to the recovery supports of their choice, eliminating systems, structures, and constructs that marginalize people by race and ethnicity.
- We commit to including a specific budget item to fund the racial justice/racial equity work of our agencies/organizations.
- We commit to advocating for the needs for additional funds to support our organizations' collective progression and for other organizations to join us.

Education

- We commit to ensuring that we, the Board, staff, volunteers, and members of our organizations receive training and education on the layers of anti-Black racism, and the ways structural racism creates barriers to inclusion, representation, and opportunities.
- We commit to educate members of the recovery advocacy movement from the unique mission and focal areas of each organization.
- We commit to educating ourselves and others about the many unacknowledged advantages a white supremacist society bestows upon white people. We acknowledge that one of these privileges is the ability to remain unaware of others' cultural practices and experiences. We, therefore, commit to challenging our ignorance.
- We commit to taking personal responsibility for educating ourselves of the Black and Indigenous community's resilience and reducing our complicity in perpetuating racial trauma.

Accountability

- We commit to creating self-correction goals, sharing them publicly on our organization's website, and publicly issuing quarterly progress updates regarding how and when we are meeting those goals.
- We refuse to prioritize white comfort over the safety of Black and Indigenous(?) people. We are committed to bringing issues out into the open, naming them for what they are, and dialoguing with each other. We hold that it is not divisive to acknowledge that racism—particularly anti-Blackness—is happening around us, but rather, a starting point for healing.
- We commit to reviewing our policies and practices *regularly* from an equity-centered and anti-Black racist lens. When policies are written or revised, we will ensure that we consult Black leaders and stakeholders.
- We commit to disaggregating our data to analyze anti-Black and racist patterns and covert disparities in support of multiple pathways.

Metrics- Suggested for Phase II

To measure our progression, we commit to:

- Circulating and initiating research, analyses, data, etc., to inform the work of the group.
- Posting this document on our sites/among membership.
- Incorporating explicit anti-racism language into proposals, materials etc

- Convening quarterly meetings of the participating organizations.
- Developing and sharing model anti-discrimination policies that specify the response to anti-Black racism at the organizational level, and influencing state/federal policy through our national advocacy work.
- Assessing the changes to leadership of this group/others in our organizations over the coming months/years.
- Issuing quarterly progress updates among the participating organizations.

ⁱ In 1847, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass published the first issue of the *North Star* newspaper, named after the star escaping slaves followed to reach the Northern United States & Canada. We therefore use this phrase as a deliberate throughline between the antislavery advocacy of Douglass and his contemporaries to today’s Black Lives Matter Movement and other racial justice causes. For though time has passed, the issues of anti-black racism in America persist—including within recovery spaces and our organizations. In this titling we seek to honor that history and stand the course.

For more information, see [The Fredrick Douglass Newspapers \(1841 to 1874\) Collection](#) (Library of Congress, online.)

ⁱⁱ Throughout this document we use the terms Black, Indigenous, and Black & Indigenous, but this is not done interchangeably. We must be intentional and specific when setting equity commitments, especially in our language. Terms like People of Color (POC) or Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) can quickly lose their impact due to improper usage in documents such as this. Namely, saying POC when, in reality, an issue predominantly affects Black or Indigenous people. It is a trend we see obscuring *who* is most impacted by *what* practices. We submit that if we center Black and Indigenous peoples, and address the structural inequities they face, that this work may be used as a guide to effect systemic change for all People of Color with adjustments for each populations’ unique needs.

We use these terms as a linguistic reminder that Black and Indigenous peoples across the United States—through criminalization and other injustices—have felt the biased results most frequently and severely of our white supremacist structures’ approach to substance use and Substance Use Disorder. We do our best not to sacrifice nuance and specificity for a “one size fits all” approach to inclusivity. Doing so robs us of our valuable differences and lessens the impact of the work.

See [Why the term “BIPOC” is so complicated, explained by linguists & BIPOC: What Does It Mean?](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Association of Alternative Peer Groups, Association of Recovery Schools, Faces & Voices of Recovery, National Alliance for Recovery Residences, the Association of Recovery in Higher Education, White Bison, and Young People in Recovery.

^{iv} See [White Dominant Culture and Something Else Worksheet from CA](#)

^v Cultural imperialism refers to “the idea of the culture of one powerful civilization, country, or institution having great unreciprocated influence on that of another, less powerful, entity” to a degree that the less powerful entity is expected to reject their own culture and embrace that of the dominant power. See [Cultural Imperialism & Communication](#).

^{vi} also referred to as the School-to-Prison Pipeline