

Why Recovery Community Centers Must Offer Multiple Pathways

A Research-Backed Guide for RCC Leaders, Boards & Community Partners

1. RCCs Exist to Serve ALL People in Recovery

Recovery Community Centers (RCCs) are designed to be welcoming, inclusive, and person-centered. They are neutral community hubs where every person—regardless of their pathway—has a place.

A single-path model limits reach and harms equity by:

- Excluding those who don't align with one pathway
- Reinforcing stigma (“you must recover this way”)
- Reducing participation from diverse populations
- Violating national RCC standards

RCCs thrive when everyone can see themselves reflected inside the space.

2. National Standards Require Multiple Pathways

National authorities are clear:

SAMHSA defines recovery as a holistic, self-directed process with *multiple pathways*. This includes:

- 12-step
- SMART Recovery
- Faith-based recovery
- Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)
- Refuge Recovery
- LifeRing
- Harm reduction–supported recovery
- Cultural and indigenous healing practices

Faces & Voices of Recovery, the national RCC model, requires:

- Welcoming all pathways

- Avoiding endorsement of a single ideology
- Offering unbiased peer support

A single-path RCC is not aligned with national standards.

3. Evidence Shows People Recover Better With Choice

Research from the Surgeon General, SAMHSA, and recovery science consistently shows:

- Engagement increases when people choose their own pathway
- Recovery lasts longer when the approach aligns with personal beliefs
- People with trauma histories often avoid rigid or mandatory group models
- Recovery capital grows with flexibility and autonomy

Recovery is not a single highway—people succeed when they can walk the path that fits them.

4. The Harm of a Single-Pathway RCC

A 12-step-only or abstinence-only RCC may unintentionally create harm:

- People who don't fit the pathway disengage and lose support
- Excluding individuals on MOUD increases overdose and death risk
- Stigma about “real recovery” reinforces shame and isolation
- LGBTQ+, veterans, BIPOC, trauma survivors, and young adults often struggle in rigid models

A single-path RCC replaces support with a barrier.

5. Multiple Pathways Does NOT Mean Chaos

A multiple-pathway RCC can still be:

- Structured
- Consistent
- Accountable
- Organized and safe

The philosophy—not the structure—broadens:

“There are many ways people get well, and all of them are welcome here.”

6. Why This Matters for Your RCC and Community

A multiple-pathway model:

- Expands reach and engagement
- Builds trust with diverse communities
- Increases attendance and retention
- Reduces stigma
- Aligns with SAMHSA and Faces & Voices standards
- Strengthens grant competitiveness
- Enhances community reputation
- Saves lives

A single-path RCC may help some people. A multiple-pathway RCC can help everyone.

7. A Respectful Note to 12-Step Participants

12-step programs remain powerful and life-saving. Nothing in this approach replaces or diminishes 12-step recovery.

A multiple-pathway RCC honors all pathways, recognizing:

“The pathway that saved your life may not be the one that saves someone else’s.”

Contact

CRUSH Recovery Community Center

Supporting Iowa’s recovery movement through compassion, multiple pathways, and inclusive community care.