Serving Recovery Communities on Smaller Campuses Toolkit

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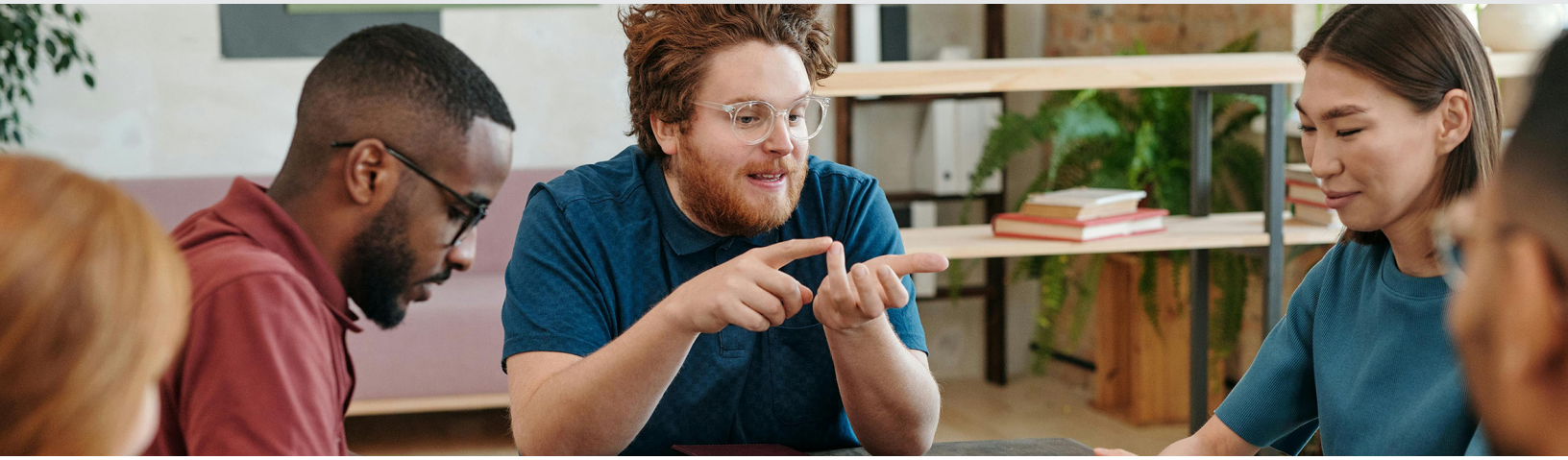

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Introduction

Purpose of the Toolkit

This toolkit supports smaller colleges and universities in creating or enhancing campus-based recovery support for students affected by substance use disorders, co-occurring mental health concerns, and trauma. It is designed to be practical, adaptable, and grounded in research-informed and equity-centered practices.

This toolkit also works for larger campuses, working to provide a smaller scale resources and support, or programming that can be scaled to size for their student population.

Introduction: Key Partner Acknowledgment

This toolkit incorporates training and implementation guidance from the MACRO (Missouri Alliance for Collegiate Recovery Organizations), Missouri Partners in Prevention, and Integrated Wellbeing Consulting.

Understanding Recovery in Higher Education

Defining Recovery

- A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.
- Recovery on campus should be inclusive of multiple pathways and identities, especially for marginalized communities.

**Recovery does not always mean abstinence. There is a need to respect whatever the person defines as their pathway to recovery.*

Why Recovery Support Matters on Smaller Campuses

- Smaller campuses may have reduced access to monetary and non-monetary resources to support students in recovery.
- Isolation, stigma, decreased resources, and less access to peer community can exacerbate dropout risks and mental health concerns.
- Having a place where students can learn about what it means to be in recovery and appropriate language to use can benefit both those seeking recovery and allies as well
- Missouri-specific collegiate recovery data.

Myths & Facts for having recovery support on small campuses

Myth: Substance use isn't a big problem on smaller campuses - we don't need formal recovery support."

- **Fact:** Even with smaller student populations, substance use and mental health challenges still occur. National surveys show similar rates of substance use and recovery needs across campus sizes. Smaller campuses may have fewer anonymous support options, making formal resources even more critical.

Myth: "If we have counseling services, that's enough."

- **Fact:** Counseling is important, but recovery support is different. Recovery programs offer peer connection, structured activities, return to use prevention, and a supportive community — all of which complement counseling and academic success services.

Myth: "Recovery programs are only for students with substance use disorders."

- **Fact:** Recovery support often includes allies, friends, and students exploring sobriety or harm reduction. This builds a larger, more connected support network on campus.

Myth: "Smaller campuses can't afford recovery programs."

- **Fact:** Recovery programs can be low-cost and scalable — starting with peer-led meetings, designated safe spaces, or partnerships with local recovery organizations. The return on investment includes improved student well-being, academic persistence, and community reputation.

Participating in the MACRO Toolkit

About the Toolkit

The MACRO toolkit includes information, resources, and enrichment learning opportunities on:

- Trauma-informed practices
- Cultural humility and equity in recovery
- Campus-community partnerships
- Recovery program planning and sustainability

Learning Outcomes

- Staff and faculty will develop fluency in recovery-friendly language, policy implications, and inclusive engagement strategies.

Assessing Campus Readiness

Self-Assessment Dimensions

- Institutional commitment (budget, leadership support)
- Policy environment (student conduct, medical amnesty)
- Campus culture (stigma, visibility of substance use/recovery)
- Community partnerships (treatment providers, mutual aid) (Asset mapping recommended)
- MACHB data information

Campus Climate Tools

- Sample survey for student interest in recovery supports
- Focus group facilitation guide
- Asset mapping worksheet

MACHB Data

- An average of 65% of students (2025 MACHB) report that campuses are concerned about the prevention of alcohol and other drug use.
- An average of 60% of students (2025 MACHB) report that alcohol prevention and/or services (access to screening, treatment, recovery support) are part of the job of a college campus/college staff.
- When asked why they think that students may not seek resources for their alcohol prevention/treatment
- 71% They are embarrassed to seek services
- 65% Not thinking they need support/treatment
- 60% Lack of knowledge on where to access resources
- Showing that having even a small space may lessen embarrassment, feel a sense of community to seek help, and know where to seek that help.
- An average of 91% of students (2025 MACHB) report that they are supportive of their campus providing resources (educational or support) about drug overdoses.

Building the Infrastructure

Program Models for Smaller Campuses

- **Peer-Based Support:** Weekly recovery meetings facilitated by trained students or staff.
- **Drop-In Recovery Lounge:** A repurposed space for sober connection and study.
- **Recovery Ally Network:** Trained allies with visible signage on offices, syllabi, and email signatures. (Promote MACRO Recovery Ally Training) (include sample language)

Leadership and Staffing

Faculty Advisor or Wellness Coordinator as Point Person

- Having a designated contact person ensures accountability and consistent leadership for recovery initiatives.
- Provides students with a clear, approachable resource for navigating campus support.
- Helps integrate recovery into broader campus wellness planning.

Consider Student Internships or Graduate Assistantships

- Builds student leadership and peer-to-peer support capacity.
- Offers professional development for students in counseling, social work, public health, or wellness fields.
- Expands program sustainability by reducing reliance on limited staff time.

Incorporate Recovery into Existing Wellness/Mental Health Roles

- Leverages staff already engaged in student wellness, making recovery support more sustainable.
- Ensuring recovery is treated as an essential part of overall student wellbeing.
- Normalize recovery services as part of the standard health and wellness ecosystem.

Policies that Support Recovery

Priority Registration for Students in Recovery

- Allow students to build schedules around recovery meetings, therapy, and medical appointments.
- Helps reduce stress and scheduling conflicts, which are common barriers to maintaining recovery.
- Signals institutional commitment to recovery-friendly practices, improving retention.

Flexible Attendance Policies for Health Needs

- Recognizes recovery as a health condition that may require time for treatment, support groups, or medical care.
- Prevents students from being penalized for prioritizing their well-being.
- Encourages honesty and openness with faculty rather than secrecy or avoidance.

Non-Punitive Approaches for Students Who Return to Use

- Frames return-to-use as part of the recovery process rather than a disciplinary failure.
- Keeps students connected to academic and social support instead of isolating them.
- Promotes a compassionate, health-centered response that reduces stigma and improves outcomes.

Student Engagement and Program Development

Launching a Collegiate Recovery Community (CRC)

Start with low-barrier events: pizza night, sober tailgate, peer panel

- Find more ideas from our toolkit for recovery-friendly events **here**!

Use trauma-informed and inclusive language (See Resources and Appendices: Person First Language)

- Co-develop mission, vision, and values with students
- Free screenings and assessments for students
- Access to healthcare support (Ex, Free NRT for students going through cessation program)

Peer Leadership Development

Training Peer Mentors or Recovery Ambassadors

- Build a visible peer support network that reduces stigma and normalizes recovery.
- Provides leadership opportunities for students with lived experience or strong allyship.
- Creates peer-to-peer connections, which are often more approachable than staff-only resources.
- Ambassadors can serve as role models, advocates, and campus educators.

Monthly Reflection and Skill-Building Sessions

- Offers ongoing professional development for student leaders.
- Sessions can cover topics such as communication skills, boundary setting, event facilitation, and advocacy.
- Provides space for peer mentors to reflect on challenges and successes, reducing burnout.
- Strengthens consistency and quality of peer-led recovery support.

Training and Capacity Building

Using the MACRO Toolkit Campus-Wide

Suggested audiences: RAs, student org leaders, DEI staff, faculty, higher education administration, student support services, and health services

- Student support staff and health services staff all play a role in shaping campus culture. Training these groups ensures recovery awareness is widespread and not siloed to one department. Broader reach builds a network of informed allies, reducing stigma and increasing access to support.

Incorporate content into orientation or first-year experience

- Early exposure normalizes conversations around recovery and wellness. It sends a message that the campus values wellbeing and provides resources from the start. Also, it helps students in recovery or those considering support feel seen and included immediately.

Recovery Ally Trainings with certificates of completion

Ongoing Development

Establish a Recovery Learning Circle for Staff

- Provides a regular space for staff to deepen their understanding of recovery issues.
- Encourages cross-departmental collaboration and keeps recovery on the agenda.
- Help normalize ongoing learning instead of one-time training.
- It can include book/article discussions, case studies, or guest speakers.

Send a Team to Regional or National Conferences (e.g., ARHE)

- Exposes staff to best practices and innovative recovery programming.
- Builds connections with peer institutions and national networks.
- Supports professional development and motivation for staff engaged in recovery work.
- Allows campuses to bring back new strategies and adapt them locally.

Evaluation and Sustainability

Tracking Impact

Suggested metrics:

Attendance at Recovery Events

- Help identify which types of events are most successful.
- Provides baseline data to advocate for continued or expanded funding.

Self-Reported Wellbeing Improvements

- Can be measured through short surveys or feedback forms.

Academic Persistence Among Participants

- Demonstrates how recovery support contributes to retention and graduation.
- A powerful data point for administrators and funders.

MACHB data

Data from the 2025 MACHB shows that all campuses report at least some percentage of students who are in recovery from alcohol and other drugs.

- Average 4.1%
- Range is from 0.5% - 10%

At least 1 in 10 students who chose not to drink say it's due to personal or family history with alcohol

- Average 17%
- Range is from 10% - 25%

Most campuses report at least some percentage of students who chose not to use cannabis due to being in recovery

- Average 1.3%
- Range is from 0%-3.4%
- Only 3 campuses report 0%

Campuses report at least some percentage of students who chose not to use cannabis due to personal or family history with cannabis

- Average 5.8%
- Range is from 1.7%-9.1%

Screening data - as able and available

- Useful for tailoring programming to meet actual student needs.

Feedback Loops

Monthly Participant Check-Ins

- Provides consistent opportunities to gather student input on recovery programming.
- Helps identify emerging needs, barriers, and successes in real time.
- Encourages participants to feel ownership and voice in shaping recovery supports.
- Can be structured as short surveys, focus groups, or informal conversations.

Bi-Annual Stakeholder Roundtables

- Engages a broad set of stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, community partners) in reviewing progress and identifying priorities.
- Strengthens collaboration and buy-in across departments and external partners.
- Provides accountability for sustaining and improving recovery efforts.
- Ensure recovery programming remains responsive to both student needs and institutional goals.

Funding Strategies

Internal Mini-Grants (MACRO)

- Small-scale internal funding opportunities can jumpstart recovery initiatives.
- Build institutional buy-in by showing the campus invests in its own programs.
- Useful for pilot projects or event supplies.
  - Contact Hope - Things like pizza and T.A. not furniture but pillows, and other items

SAMHSA Campus Mental Health Grants

- Federal funding sources are specifically designed to support campus-based mental health and recovery efforts.

- Can provide multi-year support for staffing, training, and program expansion.
- Aligns with evidence-based practices and national public health goals.

Partnerships with Local Health Agencies or Nonprofits

- Leverages community resources and expertise while strengthening campus-community ties.
- Partnerships can bring in funding, in-kind support (like counseling services), or shared staffing.
- Expands the reach and sustainability of campus recovery efforts beyond institutional budgets.

Communities Talk Grant (SAMHSA)

- Provides funding for prevention and awareness events, including recovery education.
- Accessible to campuses of all sizes, often with flexible application processes.
- Helps fund events that raise visibility and reduce stigma while promoting recovery-friendly environments.

Resources and Appendices

Templates and Tools

Student Interest Survey

- Helps gauge demand and identify students interested in recovery programming.
- Provides data to justify program development and funding.
- It can also surface student needs, preferred events, and barriers to participation.

Sample Budget for CRC Startup

- Offers a practical roadmap for launching a Collegiate Recovery Community (CRC).
- Can be adapted to fit different campus sizes and funding levels.
- Demonstrate transparency and realistic planning when seeking administrative or grant support.

Room Reservation and Event Planning Checklists

- Simplifies logistics by outlining step-by-step tasks for hosting events.
- Ensures consistency in program delivery and avoids overlooking key details.
- Reduces staff/student burden by creating a reusable tool for all events.

Communication Toolkit (Emails, Flyers, etc.)

- Help normalize recovery programming by integrating it into regular campus communications.
- Encourages broader participation by making it easy for faculty, staff, and students to share information.

Partner Organizations

Association of Recovery in Higher Education (ARHE)

- National association dedicated to supporting collegiate recovery programs.
- Provides conferences, resources, and networking opportunities.
- A strong partner for advocacy, training, and best practices.

Young People in Recovery (YPR)

- National grassroots organization that empowers young people in or seeking recovery.
- Provides peer-led recovery support, policy advocacy, and leadership development.
- Can help connect campuses to broader youth recovery movements.

Missouri Alliance of Collegiate Recovery Organizations (MACRO)

- State-level network supporting collegiate recovery in Missouri.
- Offers toolkits, training, and technical assistance for program development.
- Facilitate collaboration among campuses to share resources and strategies.

Integrated Wellbeing Consulting (Recovery IWC: Virtual Recovery Toolkit)

- Provides consulting and resources for integrating recovery into broader wellbeing initiatives.
- Offers virtual recovery tools, making programming more accessible.
- Useful for smaller campuses or those with limited in-person resources.

Grant Opportunities

- Event Funding: MACRO (contact Hope)
- SAMHSA Communities Talk Stipend ($750.00)
  - All of the planned stipends for the 2025 Communities Talk cycle have been distributed.

Person First Language

Person-first language helps to shift the focus back to the person's humanity, not their stigmatized identity or illness. Changing your language is a way of being more inclusive.

You can fight stigma by:

- Avoiding words like "abuse," "alcoholic," or "addict"
- Elevating and celebrating the many pathways to recovery
- Using person-first language (e.g., person with a substance use disorder, person in recovery)
- Sharing the many diverse stories of recovery
- Highlighting the recovery, not the addiction

Person-first language is critical to remember. It is also essential to recognize that specific terminology may still be used in various settings. Recognize the context of where you are and the language others use, and understand that person-first language will almost always be preferable. The chart below can help you determine the appropriate language for various settings.

	Mutual Aid Meetings	In Public	With Clients	Medical Settings	Journalists
Addict	✓	●	●	●	●
Alcoholic	✓	●	●	●	●
Substance Abuser	●	●	●	●	●
Opioid Addict	✓	●	●	●	●
Relapse	✓	●	●	●	●
Medication-Assisted Treatment	●	●	●	●	●
Medication-Assisted Recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person with a Substance Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Person with an Opioid Use Disorder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-Term Reovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pharmacotherapy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Image-based on Ashford, R.D. Brown, A.M, & Curtis, B. (2018) Substance use recovery and linguistics: The impact of word choice on explicit and implicit bias. Drug and Alcohol Dependence 189,131-138.

Language matters but can change depending on the setting we are in. Choosing when and where to use certain language and labels can help reduce stigma and discrimination towards substance use and recovery.

An additional helpful language guide can be found here!

Conclusion and Call to Action

Smaller campuses have unique strengths: intimacy, community, flexibility. With the support of this toolkit, your institution can become a haven of healing, connection, and opportunity for students in recovery. Learn more about recovery initiatives through the on-demand, online curriculum "From Concept to Community: Strategies for Supporting Students in Recovery on Campus and Beyond".

"Recovery is community. A recovery-friendly campus is a culture change. Recovery is possible on every campus." - Integrated Wellbeing Consulting