

About half of the participants identified as being in long-term recovery from substance use or mental disorders, which Mr. Wuelfing and Mr. Valentine characterized as giving the workshop “authenticity of voice.” That is, a majority of participants were drawn from the recovery community, giving people in recovery adequate representation to effectively voice their needs and concerns. Interestingly, some recoverees had not publicly disclosed their recovery status until this meeting; the supportive environment provided by the workshop enabled them to do so without feeling stigmatized.

Consultant Jim Wuelfing facilitated the workshop, and CCAR Director Phil Valentine was present throughout the workshop to provide input about how CCAR and other RCOs across the country address different issues.

One of the first exercises was for participants to list the practical and ethical reasons that Idaho needed an RCO: to improve Idaho’s *mental health* and *substance abuse* systems, reduce the State’s prison population, help others achieve recovery, and eliminate the stigma of identifying as a person in recovery. Many participants noted that they had family members in recovery, as well as loved ones whose lives were lost to substance abuse.

The RCO’s Role

Phil Valentine began the workshop with a presentation on CCAR’s work to demonstrate how an RCO could serve Idaho. RCOs play a unifying role in the recovery community, and attract many persons in recovery as well as family, friends and neighbors to its activities. RCOs effectively “put a face on recovery,” providing recoverees representation on important issues and presenting them as living proof that recovery is possible and a reality in millions of people’s lives. The more active an RCO and its membership become (e.g., speaking engagements, printed media, air time on cable networks, social media outreach, public events), the more the surrounding community increases its involvement in and support for the recovery community—“build it, and they will come.”⁶ Jim Wuelfing also noted the benefit of having the structure RCOs provide as “spokes of the wheel”: rather than opening one, local nonprofit at a time, a State’s recovery community can erect one umbrella organization and create local, independent chapters underneath its structure.



Idaho Department of Health and Welfare’s seven regions, with Caldwell located in Region 3 in the west of the State.

⁶ Phil Valentine, “CCAR Experience,” Presentation, Recovery Community Organization (RCO) Workshop, Boise, ID, March 17, 2014.