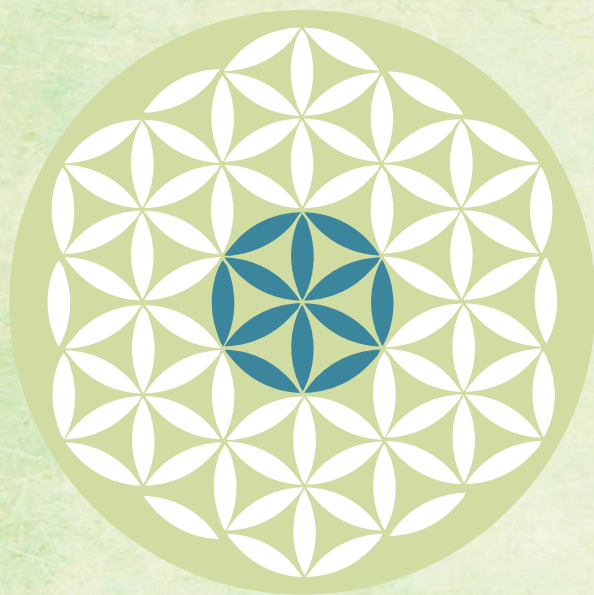




RECOVERING PEOPLE'S CONVENTION

PURPOSE



To convene people in recovery and recovery allies from across Ohio to create a shared advocacy agenda while nurturing and sustaining a statewide movement that proactively advances recovery-supportive policies, strengthens recovery services, and improves the lives of people seeking and sustaining recovery.



The OCAAR Mission

People with lived experience mobilize their expertise to ensure equity for those seeking and in recovery from substance use disorders across Ohio.

AGENDA

- I. Welcome!
- II. Keynote: Jesse Heffernan, Helios
- III. 2025-2026 Advocacy Report: Molly O'Neill, CEO
- IV. Establishing / Updating Priorities: Maurice Stevens, Ph.D, OSU
- V. Advocacy Do's and Don'ts: Jesse Heffernan, Helios



JESSE HEFFERNAN



Jesse Heffernan is a senior public health consultant and systems strategist dedicated to building equitable, recovery-oriented ecosystems and community-led infrastructures. As the founder of Helios Recovery Services and drawing on more than two decades of experience spanning frontline advocacy, federal behavioral health policy, and international technical assistance, including leadership roles with HHS/SAMHSA, Faces & Voices of Recovery, NAMI, and AmeriCorps, Jesse brings a rare perspective that connects high-level policy directly to the communities those systems are meant to serve. His work focuses on dismantling paternalistic, inaccessible policies and replacing them with practical frameworks grounded in human agency, dignity, lived experience, and healing-centered engagement.

A seasoned facilitator, consultant, and public speaker, Jesse applies a **systemic drivers of health lens** directly to organizational strategy and transformation. Whether he is training professionals across multiple countries, bringing hundreds of cross-sector stakeholders together for statewide alignment days in the Midwest, or turning grassroots advocacy into signed legislation, his focus remains the same: **throw out performative solutions and build things that actually work.** At the center of Jesse's work is a simple commitment: **systems should serve people, not force people to survive them.**

**RECOVERING
PEOPLE'S
ADVOCACY
REPORT 2025-2026**



Recovery-Informed Lens

OCAAR reviews policy by asking: Does it reduce stigma? Does it respect people's dignity and choices? Does it avoid new barriers and protect people from harm? Does it expand access to recovery support and fund recovery services? Does it help with housing and jobs, support families, and include real input from people in recovery?

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From Convention Priorities to Year-Round Action

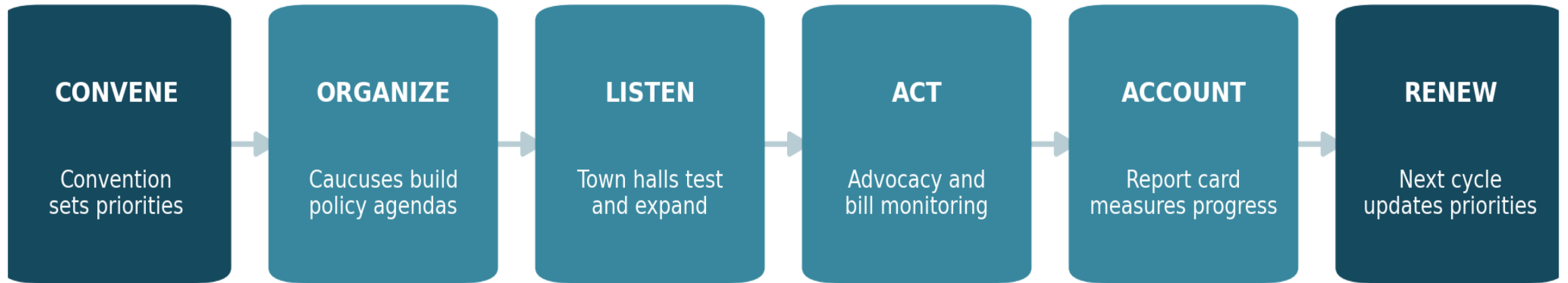
OCAAR's advocacy work each year starts with the Recovering People's Convention. At the last Convention, people with lived experience came together. They named shared priorities and built the Recovering People's Platform. OCAAR then used those priorities in several ways: to organize caucuses, guide community listening, and build policy positions. OCAAR also used them to review legislation and plan the next advocacy steps.

Review of the Previous Convention

The 2025 Recovering People's Convention met in September 2025. It brought together 78 people with lived experience. They named five top priorities: recovery housing, Recovery Community Organizations (RCO's) peer support, decriminalizing addiction, and Family and youth services,



FROM RECOVERING PEOPLE'S CONVENTION TO YEAR-ROUND ACTION



Community priorities move through a repeating cycle of leadership, action, accountability, and renewal.



ADVOCACY CAUCUSES

Recovery Housing

The Profession of Peer
Support

Recovery Community
Organizations

Decriminalization
of Drug Use

Family and Youth
Services

Media
Management



THREE CAUCUS GROUPS MET BI-MONTHLY

Priority	Work advanced during the year	Progress Made	Next step
Recovery Housing	Reviewed recovery-housing bills and how they were carried out. Town halls confirmed housing as a foundation for recovery.	HB 58 graded F SB 138 graded C	Continue to advocate for safe access to recovery housing in all communities.
Peer Support	The caucus agenda focused on billing, pay, career ladders, supervision, and workplace fairness.		Worked to collaborate with the National Peer Recovery Alliance. Focused on Professionalism of CPRS Supported Transition of CPRS to the Chemical Dependency Board
Recovery Community Organizations	RCOs were positioned as essential community infrastructure that needs recognition and equitable financial support.		Pursue direct, multi-year funding and formal inclusion in system planning.

TOWN HALL

Listening Session



Community Engagement and Priority Setting

OCAAR's town halls gave people affected by substance use disorder and recovery systems a chance to speak. They shared what helps, what harms, and what Ohio needs to change.

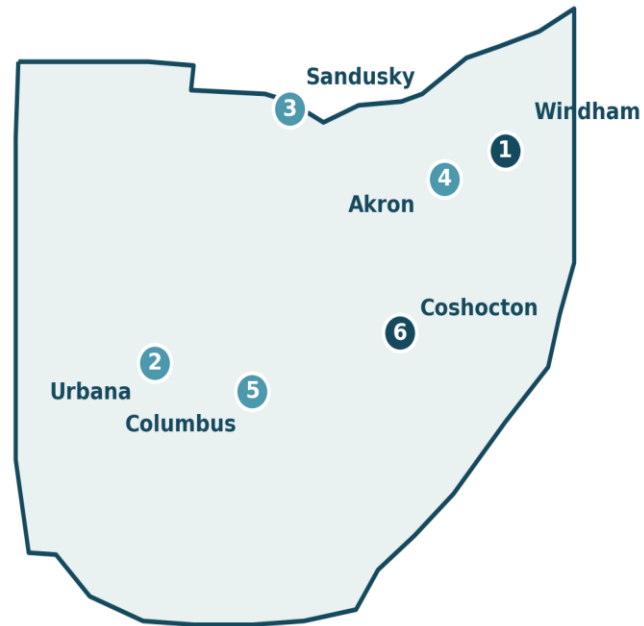
Across every community, participants said the same thing: recovery is a long process of rebuilding health, relationships, stability, purpose, and belonging.



TOWN HALL LISTENING SESSIONS

2026 TOWN HALL LOCATIONS ACROSS OHIO

Community listening sessions identified in source materials



- 1 HopeTown Town Hall**
Mar 3, 2026 • Windham, Ohio
- 2 RecoveryZone Town Hall**
May 7, 2026 • Urbana, Ohio
- 3 Sandusky Artisans Town Hall**
May 14, 2026 • Sandusky, Ohio
- 4 Hope United Town Hall**
May 18, 2026 • Akron, Ohio
- 5 Heartland Town Hall**
May 27, 2026 • Columbus, Ohio
- 6 BlueSky Town Hall**
Jun 8, 2026 • Coshocton, Ohio

TOWN HALL SESSIONS

From January 2026 through June 2026, Ohio Citizen Advocates for Addiction Recovery traveled around Ohio to listen to successes and challenges faces by Ohioans in recovery from substance use disorders. These sessions created space for open dialogue about the strengths and gaps in our recovery support systems. Participants reflected on their lived experiences and shared what made a difference in their journey, what still stands in the way of sustained recovery, and what needs to change at the systems level to better support individuals and families.



At each town hall event, OCAAR asked participants with a series of prompts. Attendees had the opportunity to respond to the prompts provided as well as speak to their experiences outside of the prompts.

WHAT WE ASK

What support service was the most important to you when you were seeking recovery/ in early recovery?

What barriers have you faced in accessing recovery supports?

What is the most critical service in your community?

What do you want decision makers to know about your recovery journey?

WHAT IS / ISN'T WORKING: WHAT'S MISSING?

WHAT'S WORKING



Peer relationships, sponsors, and mentors



Recovery communities, schools, and faith spaces



Supportive families and trusted adults



Multiple pathways to recovery



Trauma-informed, person-centered care

WHAT'S MISSING



Safe, affordable, recovery-supportive housing



Reliable transportation to services and work



Long-term support after treatment



Trauma and mental health care that work together



Youth-specific recovery communities



Coordinated systems, not disconnected agencies



Freedom from stigma everywhere

THE STATE OF RECOVERY IN OHIO

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF A STRONG RECOVERY ECOSYSTEM



THE STATE OF RECOVERY IN OHIO

Pillar	What it includes	Policy direction
Recovery Infrastructure	Housing, transportation, insurance, identification, childcare, employment, and technology.	Fund and coordinate these practical supports as core recovery services.
Recovery Relationships	Peers, sponsors, families, recovery coaches, teachers, and welcoming communities.	Expand peer-led, family-centered, and community-based supports.
Recovery Systems	Treatment, healthcare, education, housing, benefits, and criminal justice.	Create warm handoffs between systems, shared accountability, and fewer paperwork barriers.
Recovery Culture	Public understanding, stigma reduction, dignity, and multiple pathways.	Use person-first language and recovery-oriented practices across institutions.
Recovery Leadership	Real authority for people with lived experience.	Build lived experience into planning, funding, oversight, and evaluation.

Policy Priorities Across All Areas

- Expand recovery-supportive housing and housing navigation.
- Improve transportation to treatment, work, recovery services, and etc.
- Increase investment in peer recovery support and Recovery Community Organizations.
- Expand behavioral health services that understand trauma.
- Strengthen youth-specific recovery programming and recovery schools.
- Improve coordination across healthcare, treatment, schools, housing, criminal justice, and community organizations.
- Expand second-chance employment and reduce barriers created by criminal records.
- Support multiple pathways to recovery.
- Make sure people with lived experience help guide every stage of public decisions.

THE RECOVERING PEOPLE'S PLATFORM '25-'26

OCAAR'S FIVE ADVOCACY PILLARS PROVIDE STRUCTURE FOR TURNING COMMUNITY VOICE INTO COORDINATED POLICY ACTION.

HOUSING

RECOVERY REQUIRES A SAFE AND STABLE PLACE TO LIVE.
INCREASE AFFORDABLE AND RECOVERY-SUPPORTIVE HOUSING SUPPLY.
PROTECT RESIDENT SAFETY WITHOUT CREATING UNNECESSARY ACCESS BARRIERS.
SUPPORT HOUSING NAVIGATION AND FAIR ACCESS IN RURAL AREAS.

PEER SUPPORT

PEER SUPPORT IS A PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP THAT BRIDGES DIFFERENT SYSTEMS.
INVEST IN PEER-LED SERVICES AND PAY FOR THEM IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY.
STRENGTHEN CAREER PATHWAYS, SUPERVISION, AND WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS.
KEEP PEER SUPPORT NON-CLINICAL AND FOCUSED ON RECOVERY.

RECOVERY COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

RCO'S ARE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LED BY AND FOR PEOPLE IN RECOVERY.
PROVIDE SUSTAINED, DIRECT FUNDING.
INCLUDE RCOS IN LOCAL AND STATE PLANNING.
CREATE CERTIFICATION RULES THAT FIT PEER-LED ORGANIZATIONS.

THE RECOVERING PEOPLE'S PLATFORM '25-'26

cont'd

DECRIMINALIZING ADDICTION

SYSTEMS SHOULD REDUCE HARM AND EXPAND PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY. CHOOSE TREATMENT AND RECOVERY SUPPORT OVER JAIL TIME WHEN APPROPRIATE.

REDUCE SIDE EFFECTS OF A CRIMINAL RECORD THAT BLOCK HOUSING AND JOBS. PROTECT DIGNITY, DUE PROCESS, AND ACCESS TO MEDICATION AND PEER SUPPORT.

FAMILY AND YOUTH SERVICES

RECOVERY AFFECTS FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE, AND THEY CAN HELP STRENGTHEN IT TOO. EXPAND YOUTH RECOVERY SUPPORTS AND RECOVERY-SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION. FUND FAMILY PEER SUPPORT AND NAVIGATION. DESIGN CONSENT AND SERVICE POLICIES AROUND SAFETY, DIGNITY, AND ACCESS.



During the reporting period, OCAAR connected everyday community experience to statewide advocacy. Think of OCAAR's work as a cycle. First, listen to communities. Then name shared priorities and build lived-experience leadership. Next, turn those priorities into policy positions and review what government is doing. Finally, share the findings with advocates and decision-makers.

A YEAR OF ADVOCACY: OCAAR'S WORK



Advocacy function	Progress during the reporting period
Listen	Held recovery town halls and pulled together findings from across communities.
Organize	Kept up issue-based engagement through the five advocacy pillars.
Develop policy	Connected community priorities to the Recovering People’s Platform and legislative rubric.
Educate	Wrote recovery-focused explanations of legislation, laws, and rules.
Advocate	Tracked legislation and pushed recovery-informed positions.
Build leadership	Created pathways for people with lived experience to help shape public decisions.

Policy Alignment: Community Voice and Legislative Action

Community priority	Relevant activity
Housing	HB 58; SB 138; HB 33 implementation
Overdose prevention	SB 137; HB 57
Peer support and RCOs	HB 96 appropriations; administrative rules
Youth and families	HB 57; HB 172
Decriminalizing addiction	HB 622; diversion and jail initiatives
Access to care	HB 96; Medicaid waiver/work requirement activity



PEOPLE DESERVE SECOND CHANCES.
TRANSFORMING SOCIETY.

A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

THERAPEUTIC
CHANGE

IMPROVE LIVES.

PEOPLE STEREOTYPE

CIVILITY

PRISON REFORM

EDUCATE AND EMPOWER.

IN PRISON

MS.K

ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.

CRIMINAL RECORD

SUPPORT

HUMANITARIAN

EMPOWER

TOO MANY

UNIFIED ADVOCACY AGENDA





Professor in the Department of Comparative Studies, Associate Dean for Engagement for the College of Arts and Sciences at Ohio State University.

MAURICE STEVENS, PHD

Maurice Stevens, Stevens teaches theories and methods of interdisciplinary cultural and technological studies. Stevens brings expertise in designing engaged research methodologies, participatory leadership processes, and community-driven social justice informed research to their scholarly and systems enhancement efforts. As Associate Dean for Engagement, Stevens drives the College of Arts and Sciences Signature approach to engaging community and other partners in projects that address critical community needs.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION



Round One:

What time is it for
legislators in this
Domain?



LIGHT POPCORN

What was one thing that when you talked about it your group intensity was highest?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Round Two:

What more is possible for recovery-supportive policies in this space?





LIGHT POPCORN

What would your group
Agree was the most surprising
thing that came up in your
conversation?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION



Round Three:

What could
recovery services in
this
domain *also* be?



LIGHT POPCORN

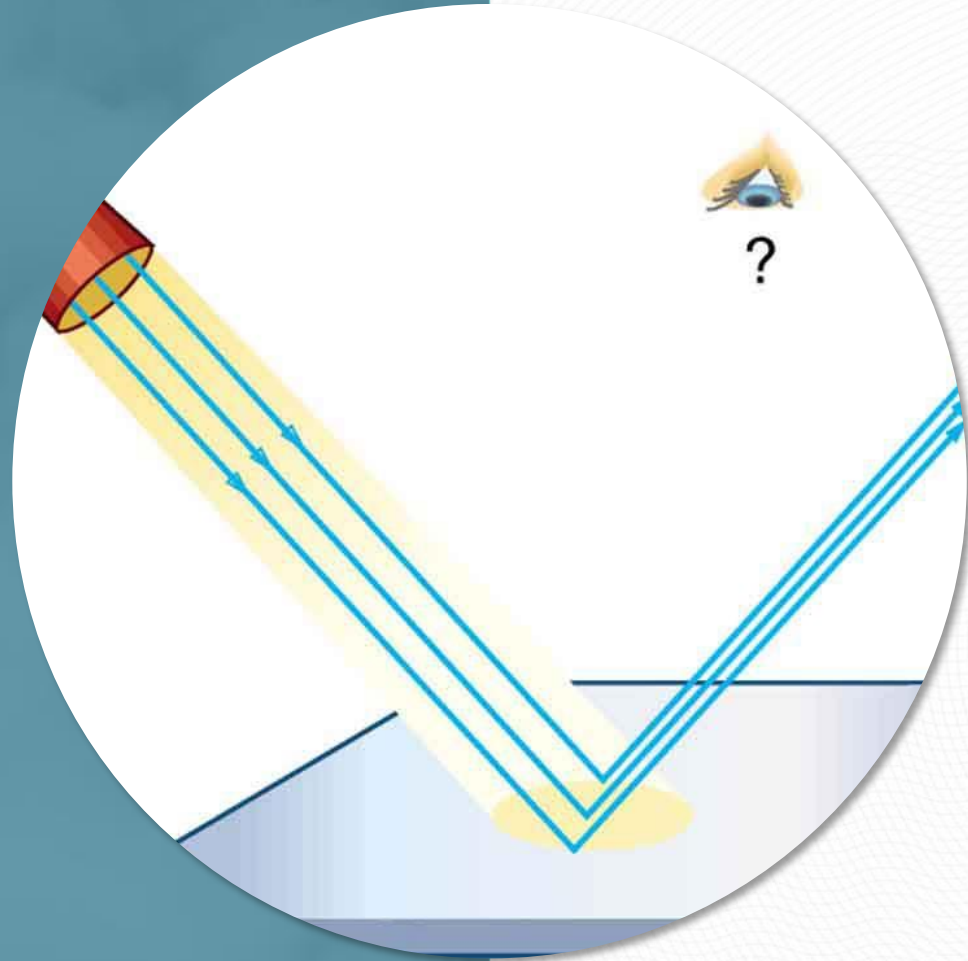
What would be the **next** most important victory in this domain?

Link up with other small groups in your space and agree on ONE or TWO that you will share out to the larger group

Large Group Closing and Report Out:

Each group shares one next
most important victory
because this work comes in
discreet steps!

REFLECTION ON ACTION

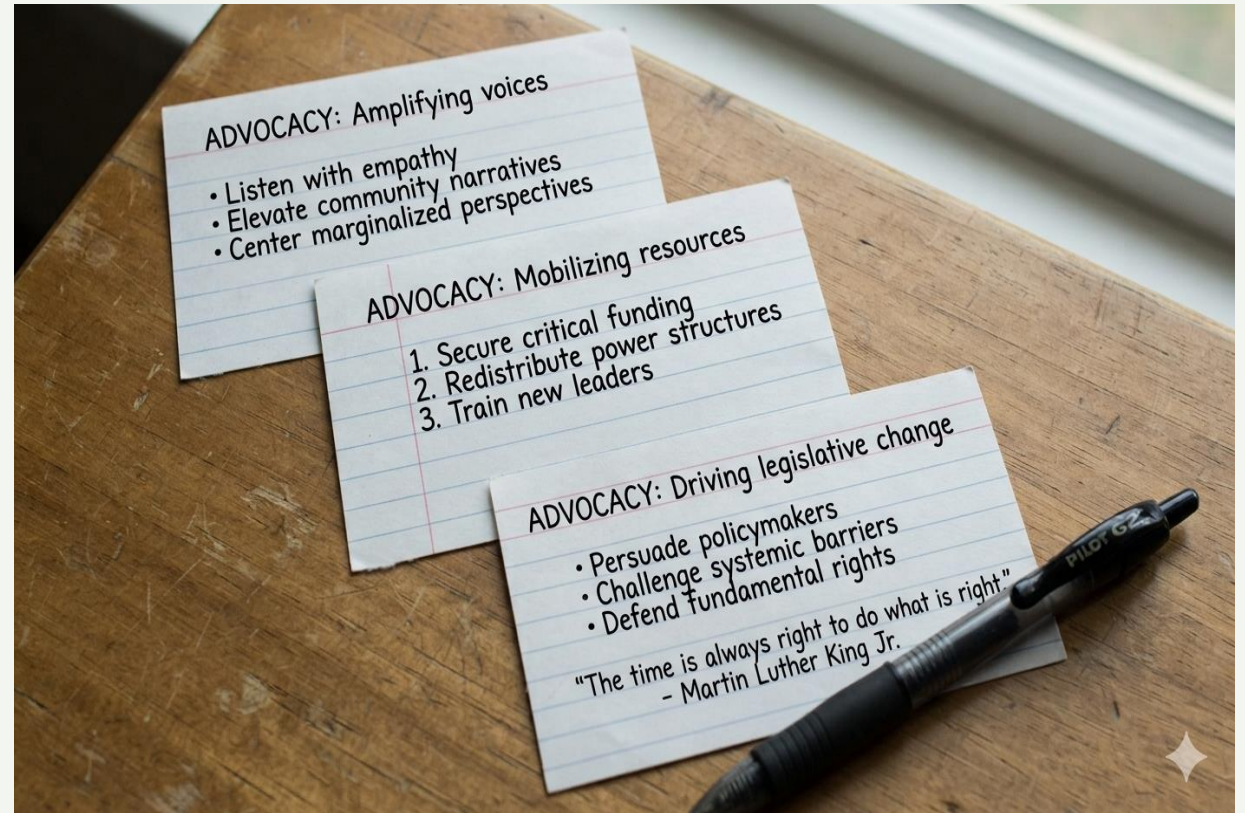


What can people do in collaboration with OCAAR?

- Caucus Groups
- Speakers Bureau
- Letters to legislators and editors
- Call-to-action calling campaigns

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

1. What action would I take in the next 30 days to support this work?
2. What can OCAAR do to help you achieve this?







Thank you!