



National Alliance on Mental Illness

# MEMO

To: NAMI Leaders  
From: Advocacy & Public Policy Team  
Date: August 2, 2016  
RE: Election 2016

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Now that the Republican and Democratic National Conventions are behind us, Election 2016 is in full swing. NAMI grassroots advocates have a crucial role to play in telling candidates for federal, state and local office - across all parties - that voters care about mental health.

Keep in mind that NAMI organizations are nonprofits. While election education and engagement activities are allowed, there are some restrictions. Here is what to do—and what not to do—to operate within permissible boundaries while you urge candidates to [#Act4MentalHealth](#).

## What to do:

- **Educate candidates on mental health**
  - Download NAMI's [priorities](#) and share with candidates.
  - Ask candidates open-ended [questions](#) about mental health.
  - Highlight on social media, websites and newsletters when candidates speak out about mental health, but only if all candidates are covered in a politically neutral way (see below for examples).
- **Promote voter registration**
  - Promote [voter registration](#) on your website and in your communications.
  - Provide voter registration forms at community events, NAMI meetings, NAMIWalks or other venues.
- **Help get out the vote**
  - Help voters determine where and when to vote, and what to expect at the polling place.
  - Display nonpartisan sample ballots before the election.
  - Distribute [information about voter rights for people with mental illness](#).
- **#Act4MentalHealth**
  - Go to [www.nami.org/Act4MentalHealth](http://www.nami.org/Act4MentalHealth) and find materials including:
    - Sample social media posts
    - Voting rights for people with mental illness
    - #Act4MentalHealth materials for sale (magnets, stickers, folders, signs, etc.)
    - Place to share how you #Act4MentalHealth

## What *not* to do:

- **Endorse or oppose a candidate—or appear to be favoring or disfavoring one candidate or party over another**
  - Example: A candidate mentions what he will do for mental health in a speech. His opponent does not mention mental health at all. In this circumstance, you should not comment on either candidate or link to a candidate’s speech.
  - Example: Both parties release a party platform that mentions mental health. Since both platforms mention mental health, you may provide access to or copies of the platforms to your members—but you may not comment on either platform’s provisions.
  - Example: Both candidates for the same elected office talked about or provided answers to questions on mental health. In this circumstance, you can provide both candidates’ commentary or answers—but without NAMI’s commentary or unbalanced placement.
- **Make a campaign contribution to, or an expenditure for, a candidate from NAMI**
- **Rate candidates on who is most favorable to NAMI’s issues or publicize which candidates share the NAMI’s views**
  - Example: You want to create a voting record on mental health issues. There are some narrow circumstances when you may publish a voting record, but before an election is **not** advisable for a nonprofit.
- **Host a candidate forum or event unless candidates of both parties or the majority of candidates for an office are able to attend**
  - Example: You invite all candidates for your state representative seat, but only one can make it. You should either reschedule for a time that the majority of or all candidates for the office can be present or cancel the event. If there is only one candidate, you may invite him or her to an event.
- **Do not ask candidates questions that have a “right” answer or answer that clearly aligns with NAMI’s positions—ask open-ended questions only**

To learn more, watch this NAMI [webinar](#).

## FAQs for nonprofit staff, Board members and volunteers

### Can I express my personal political views?

- NAMI staff, Board members and volunteers are free to participate in partisan activities in their personal time. To engage in partisan activities during the work day, staff members must take non-paid personal time.
- You may not make partisan comments in NAMI organization publications and you may not publicly express your opinions on candidates while serving as a representative of NAMI at an event.

- If you are a NAMI staff member or leader who is primarily using your social media account(s) in your professional NAMI role, you should avoid tweeting or posting your personal political views, candidate comments or political commentary or information that could be viewed as partisan.
- You may share your political views in your personal social media accounts. But, we recommend that you note that the views you express are your own if you are known as a NAMI representative or staff.
- NAMI staff, Board members and volunteers should not wear pins, stickers or visibly identify with specific candidates or political parties while representing NAMI at an event, such as a NAMI booth or candidate forum.
- Do not use your NAMI's resources to help or oppose a particular candidate—such as organization vehicles, paper, copy machine, etc.

**What if I volunteer as a NAMI Support Group Facilitator or NAMI Education Teacher/Trainer?**

- As a NAMI facilitator, teacher or trainer, you represent our organization and serve as a role model when you volunteer. As a result, you should not wear pins, stickers or visibly identify with specific candidates or political parties and should not publicly express your opinions on candidates or political parties while serving in your volunteer role. When you are done fulfilling your NAMI role, such as after class, you are free to express your political views.

**What if a participant brings up a candidate or political party during a support group or education program?**

- If a participant is experiencing symptoms as a result of a candidate or political party, focus on the feelings and not the candidate or political party.
- If a participant brings up a political party or candidate absent any symptoms, treat the comments like any other time when a participant is off-topic—bring the individual and the group back on topic.

**Can a staff member be listed as a supporter of a candidate with the organization's title included?**

- It is okay to have your name listed as supporting a candidate. If your NAMI organization is listed, the listing should state "for identification purposes only." If you are a NAMI organization leader and you choose to make comments about candidates, you must indicate that they represent your personal opinion and not that of your NAMI State Organization or NAMI Affiliate.

**What if a candidate lists a staff member and organization as a supporter without permission?**

- If a candidate lists a NAMI staff, Board member or volunteer with their NAMI title on campaign material without the disclaimer ("for identification purposes only") the organization is not at fault. The organization should ask the campaign to remove their name from the list. Make sure to save your email or written request.

**Sources**

<http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/>

<http://www.bolderadvocacy.org>

<http://www.irs.gov/uac/Election-Year-Activities-and-the-Prohibition-on-Political-Campaign-Intervention-for-Section-501%28c%29%283%29-Organizations>

