



Election Engagement and Nonprofit Rules

All NAMI affiliates are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. While election education and engagement activities are permitted, there are some restrictions on what nonprofits can do. Below is information on what *not* to do and some FAQs to make sure you operate within permissible boundaries to protect your NAMI State Organization or NAMI Affiliate while you urge candidates to support mental health care. We recommend sharing this reminder with your Board and NAMI volunteers, as well.

What *not* to do:

- **Do NOT 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.
- **Do NOT make a campaign contribution to, or an expenditure for, a candidate from NAMI.**
- **Do NOT rate candidates on who is most favorable to NAMI's issues or publicize which candidates share NAMI's views.**
 - **Example:** You might like to create a voting record on mental health issues, however, publishing a voting record before an election is **not** advisable for a nonprofit.
- **Do NOT 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 running for a seat, you may invite him or her to an event.
- **Do NOT ask candidates questions that have an answer that clearly aligns them with NAMI's positions. Ask open-ended questions only.**

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.

- You may share your political views in your personal social media accounts. We recommend that you note in your bio or “About” section that the views you express are your own if you are known as a NAMI representative or staff. However, 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.
- 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, including resources like organization vehicles, paper, copy machines, 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 NAMI and serve as a role model when you volunteer. As a result, you should not wear political 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 concludes, 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 NAMI as a supporter without permission?

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

Questions? Find your answers from the resources below.

[Nonprofit Vote: Voter Engagement Resource Library](#)

[Bolder Advocacy: Electoral Activity](#)

[IRS Resource: The Restriction of Political Campaign Intervention by Section 501\(c\)3 Tax Exempt Organizations](#)