



National Alliance on Mental Illness

Voter Engagement Guide



Voter Engagement Guide

ABOUT NAMI

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

ABOUT VOTE4MENTALHEALTH

Vote4MentalHealth is a campaign led by NAMI, to promote nonpartisan voter participation and elevate discussions about mental health policy during the elections. NAMI does not endorse political parties or candidates.

ABOUT NONPROFIT VOTE

Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. Nonprofit VOTE is the largest source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

Connect with NAMI

Website:

www.nami.org

NAMI HelpLine:

800-950-NAMI (6264)



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Why Election Engagement Matters to NAMI



A letter from NAMI Chief Advocacy Officer Hannah Wesolowski

Dear NAMI community,

Across the country, millions of Americans will be casting their ballots to select who will represent their interests — from the city council to the statehouse to the White House. Those elected policymakers make decisions that affect you, your loved ones, and your communities.

Elections matter, especially when it comes to mental health, which is why it's so vital to #Vote4MentalHealth this year and every year. NAMI will never tell anyone who to vote for, but we want every voter who cares about mental health to understand the significance of their vote on mental health.

It's more than just pulling a lever or filling in a bubble on a ballot. Before anyone goes to the polls or mails in their ballot, voters and candidates alike must understand the impact different policies will have on people affected by mental health conditions. From health care to the economy to criminal justice and more, mental health touches many of the issues that voters care about the most. Mental health is not a red, blue, or purple issue, it's something that affects everyone.

Voting rules — whether you can vote early or on Election Day, whether you need to show an ID, whether you can mail in your ballot — continue to change in states across the country. That's why your NAMI organization plays a vital role. As leaders in your respective communities, your NAMI is a trusted source for information and support. This trust is what empowers your NAMI to make an impact by empowering people to vote. Whether this is your first time or your twentieth engaging in nonprofit elections work, we hope this toolkit will help your NAMI engage with voters and candidates in a responsible, but influential, way.

I pledge to #Vote4MentalHealth and I hope you do, too. Together, we can make mental health a top priority for voters and policymakers at all levels of government.

Sincerely,

Hannah Wesolowski
Chief Advocacy Officer
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)





Why Should NAMI Organizations Engage Voters?

Engaged voters build healthier communities. People who vote are more likely to volunteer, advocate, or be civically active in other ways. Elected officials are more likely to respond to the needs and concerns of communities that are engaged in the electoral process and are more responsive to organizations that promote voter participation. Democracy is something we can't take for granted. Voters need guidance with many of the following:

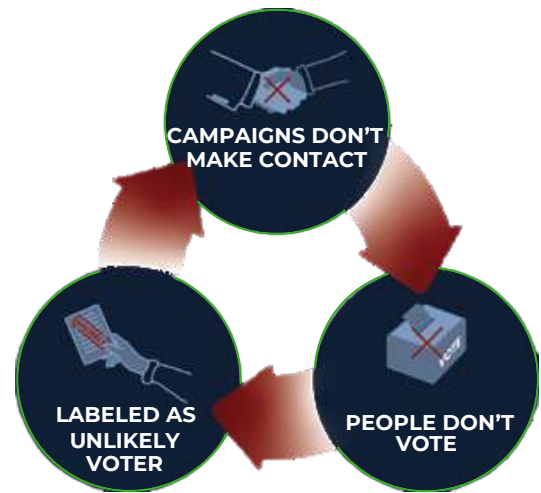
- Finding their polling location
- A number to call for voting assistance
- Learning about their voting options (early, by mail, in person, etc.)
- Understanding what's on the ballot
- The impact of the election on the mental health services and supports available in their community

NAMI organizations have a critical role to play in promoting voting as a safe and accessible activity to fulfill NAMI's mission and build a better world for people affected by mental illness.



Partisan candidate campaigns only invest in outreach to voters who have a high probability of voting in an upcoming election.

Communities who have been historically underrepresented in the election process are less likely to vote consistently, so campaigns don't see value in reaching them. Nonprofits, like your NAMI organization, already work within these underserved communities and can break the negative feedback loop by registering and turning out new voters so that elected leaders hear from more members of the community they represent.



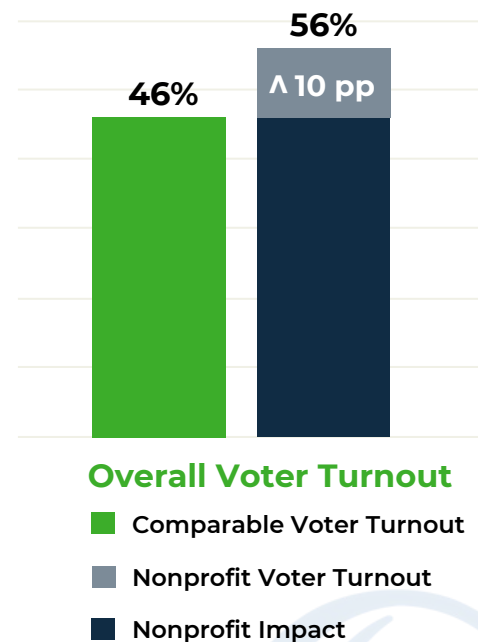
Our access and trust make us great messengers

Nonprofits are among America's most trusted community institutions.

Your NAMI organization is well-respected within your area, and NAMI staff and volunteers have personal relationships with advocates in traditionally underserved communities. Your NAMI's regular interactions with community members allow you to integrate voter engagement into existing programs and services. Your NAMI has the opportunity to use your position to become a powerful nonpartisan voice for voter participation and the issues that matter to people affected by mental health conditions in your community.

It works

According to the [2024 Nonprofit Power Report](#), nonprofit voter engagement disrupts cycles of disengagement and closes long-standing gaps in turnout. In an analysis of over 7,000 participants at nonprofits and social service agencies, Nonprofit VOTE found that voters contacted were 10 percentage points more likely to vote than demographically similar voters in their county. Those percentage points increased when focusing on underrepresented voter populations like low income voters, voters of color, and young voters. When nonprofits engage voters, we all benefit from a more inclusive and representative democracy. Learn more about the Nonprofit Power report at nonprofitvote.org.



Your NAMI is well-suited to helping people become more engaged citizens by encouraging voter participation.



Getting Started

Whether it is your NAMI organization's first time engaging voters or you are trying to deepen your NAMI's existing work, this toolkit can guide you through a successful voter engagement initiative.

Before, During, and After: Build Buy-in

A successful voter engagement plan depends on buy-in from your NAMI's leadership. Staff and volunteers are often the point people for designing and executing the plan, but the activities are more likely to be carried out organization-wide with clear and strong support from your NAMI's leadership.

- Plan a time to discuss your NAMI's voter engagement activities with your executive director and ensure you have support from your board.
- Bring this toolkit to your meeting and describe the activities you think are a good fit for your organization — make sure to specify key points of contact for engagement with your advocates.
- Highlight why this work is important for both your advocates and organization.





What's Next in This Voter Engagement Guide

Learn the Rules

Make sure your NAMI organization's efforts are nonpartisan. This means that none of your communications or activities support or oppose — or appear to support or oppose — any candidate or political party. In addition to rules about nonpartisanship, every state differs in how they run elections. Find your state's dates and deadlines, eligibility requirements, and the voting process. Often, it's best to go directly to the state or county elections office and build relationships with staff to get the most accurate information.

Make a Plan

Mapping out a clear plan for your NAMI's voter engagement activities can help ensure your efforts are successful. Every NAMI organization is different, so it's up to you to decide which activities fit most naturally into your existing programs.

Activities generally fall into three categories: voter registration, voter education, and candidate engagement. You can mix and match activities for maximum impact and effectiveness.

Talk to Voters

Above all, people want a reason to vote. Research demonstrates that people are much more likely to vote when they sense something is at stake. These voters not only believe that their vote will make a difference, but they also believe that the votes of their peers and community will have an impact as well. **Help your staff and advocates connect what's on their ballot to how it can impact the mental health care available in their community.** You can go to your city council, state legislature, or other elected legislative body's website to learn more about proposed policies that are being voted on by the people we elect. If your community wants to have a say in those policies, they can vote to elect people who align with their values.



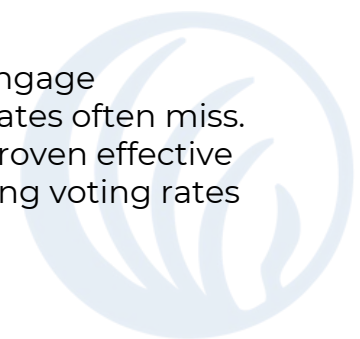
Section 1: Learn the Rules

Your NAMI's Guide to Nonpartisanship

In 1954, Congress added a sentence to Treasury regulations requiring charities to remain nonpartisan in elections. They did it to protect charities from becoming vehicles for partisan political activity and to deter the risk of Congress eliminating the charitable deduction.

But the power of being nonpartisan is much more than this statute:

- Nonpartisanship respects the diversity of political opinions among your staff, volunteers, and the people you serve.
- It strengthens your NAMI's ability to advocate across partisan lines and have access to diverse community leaders and funding sources. There is a place for a more partisan approach. That's why Congress and the IRS created 501(c)(4) social welfare advocacy organizations (and other partisan vehicles) which can do a certain amount of partisan political activity, but whose donors don't get a tax deduction.
- It makes NAMI organizations trusted messengers who can engage underrepresented communities that campaigns and candidates often miss. Being nonpartisan is one reason nonprofits like NAMI have proven effective at reaching youth, new citizens, and new voters, and increasing voting rates across all demographics.



A 501(c)(3) organization, like your NAMI, may NOT conduct partisan activities to support or oppose any candidate for public office, including:

- Endorsing a candidate or expressing support or opposition for any candidate or party (even for nonpartisan offices).
- Making a contribution to, or expenditure for, a candidate.
- Rating candidates on who is most favorable to NAMI's policy priorities or sharing messages or materials that rate or rank candidates.
- Letting candidates use the organization's facilities or resources, unless those resources are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value.

Nonpartisan activities that your NAMI, as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, may do to encourage voter participation and promote voter education include:

- Promote or conduct voter registration in alignment with state law.
- Educate voters on the where, when, and how of voting.
- Distribute nonpartisan sample ballots, candidate questionnaires, or voter guides.
- Host or co-sponsor a candidate forum.
- Encourage and remind people to vote.
- Educate community members on who the candidates are and what the offices do.
- Encourage staff to serve on Election Day as a poll worker, translator, or other nonpartisan volunteer.
- Continue issue advocacy during an election.
- Support or oppose ballot measures.

While your NAMI organization is not allowed to directly or indirectly support any candidate or political party for office, there are many nonpartisan activities your NAMI can undertake to help people vote.



What NAMI Volunteers and Leadership Can Say About the Election

All NAMI State Organizations and NAMI Affiliates are 501(c)(3) nonprofits. Volunteers and leaders working at 501(c)(3) nonprofits, like a NAMI organization, should be nonpartisan when representing NAMI on the job, at events, during classes and support groups, or while doing voter engagement activities. You cannot suggest which candidate to vote for or which political party to support.

Q. What is okay to talk about on a nonpartisan basis?

It's fine to provide information about the voting process, like important dates and deadlines, instructions on how to register or apply for a mail-in ballot, or state-specific details like early voting hours or how to vote by mail. You can also let people know about a candidate forum or debate.

Q. What if someone asks me who I support or who they should vote for?

All NAMI volunteers and leadership must be nonpartisan while they are representing NAMI. Your options are:

- Encourage the person to talk to a friend or family member they trust and share values with.
- Direct the person to a sample ballot or nonpartisan voter guide if available.
- Closer to the election, you can link them to online tools that let voters know what's on their ballot, like searching "What's on [state's] ballot?" on Google. Additionally, they may want to use online tools such as [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org), [Ballot Ready](https://www.ballotready.org), [Ballotpedia](https://www.ballotpedia.org), or visit [vote4mentalhealth.org](https://www.vote4mentalhealth.org).

Q. Can I say anything about specific candidates?

You can only answer simple facts like what party they belong to, if they're an incumbent or challenger, or where they live. Don't state your preferences.

Q. What do I say when asked about the difference between Republicans and Democrats?

There is no good answer or any accurate source that doesn't have a bias outside of the political parties' websites. You could mention the names of the current candidates and their declared party affiliation but go no further. Do the same as you would do with candidates and tell them to ask a friend or go to the political parties' official websites.

Q. What if I'm asked about a ballot measure?

Ballot measures are about laws, not candidates. You may discuss the pros and cons of a ballot measure unless your NAMI's policy is not to do so. You can also tell someone that your NAMI organization doesn't have an official position on ballot questions. See page 26 for more information on ballot measures.

Q. Can I support candidates in my personal time?

Yes. You may support candidates when not "on the clock" representing your NAMI. If you engage in partisan activities during the workday, you must take non-paid personal leave.

Q. Can I talk to other NAMI volunteers or staff about the elections?

It's normal and acceptable to exchange views on candidates and elections with other NAMI volunteers and leaders around the "water cooler" or on breaks. Remember to be respectful of those who may not be comfortable having conversations about their personal political views or other election-related topics. Do not conduct political activities during work hours, such as handing out literature or signing up other people to support a candidate.

Q. Can I wear pins or t-shirts that indicate the candidate I support while at a NAMI event?

NAMI staff, board members, and volunteers, including program and support group facilitators, should not wear pins, stickers, clothing, or visibly identify with specific candidates or political parties while representing NAMI at an event, such as a NAMIWalks event, a NAMI booth or candidate forum, or during a NAMI class or presentation.

Q. What if a participant brings up a candidate or political party during a NAMI support group or program?

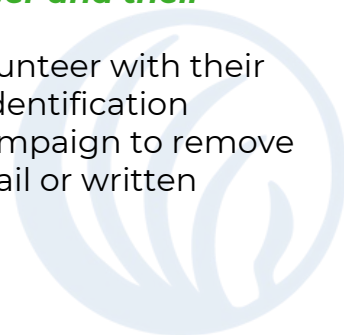
If a participant is experiencing symptoms as a result of a candidate or political party, focus on the feelings and not the candidate or political party. If a participant brings up a political party or candidate absent any symptoms, treat the comments like any other time when a participant is off-topic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

Q. Can a NAMI staff member be listed as a supporter of a candidate, with your NAMI organization also listed?

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

Q. What if a candidate lists a NAMI staff member or volunteer and their NAMI organization as a supporter without permission?

If a candidate lists a NAMI staff member, board member, or volunteer with their NAMI title on campaign materials without the disclaimer "for identification purposes only," your NAMI is not at fault. You should ask the campaign to remove that individual's name from the list. Make sure to save your email or written request in case it comes up in the future.



Digital Communications and Nonpartisanship

Your NAMI organization may use social media to communicate with the public, attract new advocates, mobilize public opinion, and promote civic engagement.

The prohibition on nonprofits participating in partisan political activities is the same for social media as it is for any other type of communication. Your NAMI may encourage people to register and vote on a nonpartisan basis, but you may not use your NAMI's social media profiles to indicate support for, or opposition to, candidates for public office.

Q. Can a NAMI staff member use a personal account to support candidates?

Individuals have a right to express preferences for or against candidates. This applies to their personal social media accounts. The exception would be if that account is primarily used by the individual or others as a communication vehicle for a NAMI organization. It's strongly recommended that NAMI staff members at all levels of the Alliance exercise good judgement when posting on social media, regardless if in a personal capacity.

Q. What about the Executive Director/CEO or Board Members?

Your NAMI's chief executive officer and board members have the same rights of free expression when not officially representing NAMI. However, to the extent they are seen by the community as representing NAMI, your organization's leaders should exercise a greater level of restraint in what they say on the internet to avoid any appearance of partisanship.

Q. What are the guidelines for tagging, sharing, or retweeting?

Don't use your NAMI's social media accounts to tag, re-tweet, or share posts with political campaigns or partisan organizations that have endorsed candidates.

Q. How about sharing content posted by a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization or other non-campaign organization whose primary purpose is other than electing candidates?

You may share content if the content shared is educational in nature and clearly nonpartisan. If you're not sure, it is always safer to share content, for example, from a state or local government elections office, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, educational source, or public media outlet not affiliated with a partisan political campaign.

Q. Is my NAMI responsible for how our posts are shared?

No. Your NAMI is not responsible for how and with whom others share your posts.

Q. What about content posted by other users to our social media platforms?

While you can't control what other people post to your wall or tweet at you, you can make a general disclaimer on your NAMI's social media accounts that your organization is not responsible for opinions posted by people not under your employ.

Finding Your State and Local Election Information

After understanding how to maintain nonpartisanship, the next step in planning your voter engagement activities is researching state and local election information. Every state runs its own elections, so rules and dates will vary and may even differ depending on the county. Always confirm your information with a reputable source, like the local election office. If you're unsure if a website is from an actual governmental office, look for websites that end in ".gov".

While not everything on the list below will be applicable in every state, gather the following as relevant before engaging voters:

When to Vote:

- When voter registration is due and whether same-day registration is available
- Election date (including primaries and special elections as applicable)
- Polling location hours (may vary between locations and dates)
- Early voting period (starting and ending date)
- When mail-in ballot requests are due and whether they must be postmarked or received by Election Day

Where to Cast a Ballot:

- Polling places
- Early voting locations (often fewer in number and more central to the county or region) vs. Election Day voting locations (a wider variety of locations spread throughout the community like schools, community centers, sometimes faith-based spaces)
- Dropbox locations for mail-in/absentee ballots

How to Participate:

- Voter registration processes, including online and in-person options
- How to vote absentee/by mail
- Type of ID needed, especially for first time voters or states with stricter requirements
- Whether the ballot is paper or electronic. If the ballot is electronic, you could ask if your elections office will run a demo for your organization. Some local boards of election will bring a voting machine to your community so that community members can become more familiar with the process
- Whether your state requires employers to provide time off to vote

If your NAMI plans to offer help with registering to vote, find out whether training is required to assist voters with registration in your state. Find more information for your state's regulations on third party voter registration drives at nonprofitvote.org.





Section 2: Make a Plan

Your NAMI's Options for Voter Engagement Activities

Get-out-the-#Vote4MentalHealth

First launched in 2018, NAMI's #Vote4MentalHealth campaign is part of NAMI's long-standing efforts to help people across the country understand that voting and mental health are closely intertwined and find the resources and information they need to cast their ballot.

As discussed in "Learn the Rules," NAMI is strictly nonpartisan and does not take positions on candidates for office or political parties.



The [#Vote4MentalHealth](#) campaign focuses on the powerful idea that everyone should understand how their vote matters for what mental health services and supports are available in our communities.

The #Vote4MentalHealth campaign has several benefits for the NAMI Alliance:

- **Candidate engagement boosts our advocacy.** Candidate engagement gets us a seat at the table and enhances our ongoing advocacy by establishing our knowledge and what we have to offer. When our NAMI communities participate, we build relationships that result in us having more access to policymakers, increased influence for our Alliance and a greater chance to have our issues addressed. Candidate and voter engagement make NAMI even more relevant.
- **Voter engagement raises our profile.** Campaigns seek out and respond to communities with higher voter registration and turnout rates and to organizations that care about voting. Candidates are more likely to attend our events, respond to our questions, and listen to our concerns if we are actively engaged in the process.

- **Engaging candidates makes space for the voice of the people affected by mental illness.** By participating in candidate forums or putting out candidate questionnaires, people become more active and engaged citizens. They learn to ask questions of candidates and to be educated and engaged voters, contributing to their own increased civic engagement.
- **When nonprofits like NAMI engage our community around voting, we are effective.**

The key call to action is the Pledge to #Vote4MentalHealth. By taking the pledge, advocates commit to doing one thing: take the time to understand how their vote impacts mental health. When someone completes the pledge, NAMI will send them election date reminders and steps they can take to #Vote4MentalHealth.

Many resources are currently available for both voters and NAMI organizations to engage their communities at vote4mentalhealth.org. NAMI will continue to add new resources throughout the election season.

Voter Registration

Every year, thousands of eligible voters miss out on their chance to #Vote4MentalHealth simply because they miss the registration deadline or forget to update their registration when they move. Whether you focus your NAMI's voter registration efforts on National Voter Registration Day, or promoting #Vote4MentalHealth in the months leading up to the election, registration is (almost) always the first step for a voter.

Publicize and Promote

Promote voter registration deadlines and how-to's in the weeks before the election. Include a link to your state's voter portal if online registration is allowed.

- Make announcements on your NAMI's digital communication channels.
- Put up posters or offer flyers with voter registration information to community members and advocates in person. Sign up as a National Voter Registration Day community partner for free posters and stickers at nationalvoterregistrationday.org.
- Talk about registering to vote at your NAMI's staff or board meeting, and on public calls and meetings, like webinars. Encourage new staff and volunteers to register to vote.

Conduct On-Site Registration

Incorporate voter registration into your NAMI's ongoing activities and community interactions. Use paper forms to register voters if your state doesn't allow for online registration or has requirements that your advocates may not meet, such as providing a driver's license number.



- Assign a staff member to plan and direct voter registration activities. Train staff on how to conduct voter registration in compliance with state laws (find your state's laws and regulations at nonprofitvote.org).
- Make voter registration forms widely available and offer new community members and advocates the opportunity to register during the sign-up process.
- Designate a staff person to promptly return forms to your local elections office in person once a week.

Mobilize and Partner

If you have the time and resources, extend your registration efforts outside your organization to the community you serve.

- Identify partners in your community and encourage them to register voters — like other nonprofits, libraries, schools, or small businesses.
- Have staff or volunteers set up a voter registration table at NAMI events or highly-trafficked areas. Good locations are where likely voters from the community congregate — supermarkets, stores, school events, places of worship, transit stops, etc.

Voter Education

Use the same strategies for voter registration, but add information about when, where, and how to cast a ballot. Include the relevant election protection hotline numbers:

- **866-OUR-VOTE** (866-687-8683),
- **888-VE-Y-VOTA** (888-839-8682) for Spanish,
- **888-API-VOTE** (888-274-8683) for Asian languages,
- **844-YALLA-US** (844-925-5287) for Arabic.

Display or Distribute Sample Ballots or Nonpartisan Voter Guides

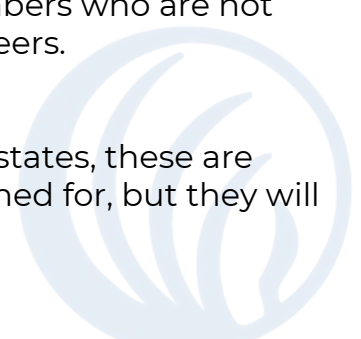
Seeing a sample ballot helps voters familiarize themselves with the voting process, giving them greater confidence to cast an actual ballot on Election Day. Share instructions for how to find sample ballots on your NAMI's website. Nonpartisan candidate guides provide an important, unbiased overview of what your community will be voting on.

Include Lessons About Voting

Your NAMI offers support groups, classes, and trainings. Consider walking through how to register to vote or apply for an absentee ballot during one of your classes or events, or sharing educational resources from NAMI's #Vote4MentalHealth campaign about the intersection of voting and mental health. Be sure to discuss the election with community members who are not able to vote and develop ways they can participate as volunteers.

Promote Poll Worker Opportunities

Share information on how to become a poll worker. In many states, these are paid volunteer positions that any registered voter can be trained for, but they will need to be available during the entire day.





Engaging Candidates for Office

Elections offer numerous opportunities to interact with candidates for elected office. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, your NAMI cannot endorse or oppose candidates for public office. However, you can still use campaigns to get NAMI's key issues in front of candidates, build relationships with future elected officials, share NAMI public policy positions, and influence future discussions and decisions. Just make sure you are offering information and invitations to candidates on a fair and equal basis. See page 27 for more information on activities to engage candidates.

Share NAMI's Public Policy Positions

Although elected officials can benefit from NAMI's ideas and research year-round, elections provide a focused opportunity to increase your NAMI's visibility while demonstrating NAMI's impact in the community. If you do engage in this way, share your NAMI's publicly available policy resources with all candidates in a particular race to ensure you avoid the perception of support.

Have a Candidate Attend a NAMI Event

Invite candidates to your NAMI's events, as the invitation alone gets NAMI's name in front of candidates. Hosting candidates at your NAMI's event also allows your members and advocates to ask questions and familiarize themselves with their choices. There are very specific rules your NAMI must follow, which are available in the "Candidate Engagement" section on pages 27-28.

Host or Co-Sponsor a Candidate Forum or Questionnaire

Candidate forums not only connect your NAMI organization with candidates, but they also give your advocates and community members a chance to meet and interact with future officials. If there are already forums planned that your NAMI will not participate in, consider a questionnaire. Invite all of the candidates in a particular race to respond to a set of questions, which you share with your community to better inform them of candidates' positions and values. Learn more on page 29.





Selecting the Right Activities

Most organizations do not attempt every possible voter engagement activity, and many start by choosing just a couple and experimenting with how to combine voter engagement with their existing services and programs. Answer the following questions to identify the right activities for your NAMI organization.

Who's Your Audience?

Consider the various audiences for your voter participation activities and communications. The activities, messages, and format of the communications you choose may change depending on your audience, including:

- Your advocates and members,
- Your staff, board members, and volunteers, or
- Your local community.

What Do They Need?

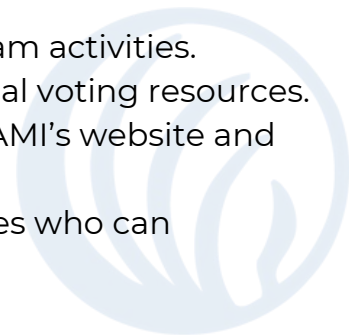
Most people need reminders about upcoming elections and information about what is on the ballot. Some voters have additional needs. Identify the barriers your community may face when trying to vote to anticipate the information or assistance needed from your NAMI to successfully cast a ballot. Examples include:

- Eligibility and registration information because they are a new or returning citizen, an out-of-state student, are experiencing homelessness, or lack a current state ID for any reason,
- Accessibility and accommodations due to disability or language barriers, or
- How to get time off from work to vote or transportation to and from the polls.

Who's Involved?

Determine who should be involved, such as staff, volunteers, advocates, and partner organizations, and provide them with some training to effectively engage voters. Consider:

- Front office staff who do intake or manage materials and signage in the lobby.
- Volunteers or interns who can take on a voter participation activity as a special project.
- Program staff who can weave voting into ongoing program activities.
- HelpLine volunteers who can answer questions about local voting resources.
- Communications staff who create assets and run your NAMI's website and social media.
- Partner organizations, coalitions, and local elections offices who can collaborate to broaden your NAMI's efforts.



What Are Your Communication Vehicles?

Plan with the people in charge of your NAMI's communications and website to include messages and announcements about voting in the weeks leading up to the election. Depending on how you reach your audience, some of these may be more effective than others:

- Signage, posters, and handouts in your lobby or service areas;
- Phone calls or texts;
- Digital channels: website, social media, newsletters, paid advertising;
- Staff meetings, inter-office memos, or emails.

How Are You Tracking and Celebrating Efforts?

If you are taking the time to run a voter engagement campaign, take the time to track, celebrate, and share your success! The documentation you do during the campaign can be used for fundraising, developing partnerships, and raising your NAMI's profile. Keep track of:

- **Metrics:** Track the number of voter registrations collected as well as events, discussions, and other voter interactions. Include digital voter outreach, such as social media posts and newsletter mentions.
- **Stories:** Take pictures of engagement activities and collect quotes from staff, volunteers, and voters. Share your story with NAMI National at elections@nami.org!

NAMI National wants to celebrate and recognize your efforts! Your NAMI organization will be recognized as a #Vote4MentalHealth All-Star if you complete at least five activities listed at vote4mentalhealth.org/allstars and report those activities via the form on the page.

**There are many options for voter engagement,
so choose the activities that align with your
NAMI's interests, capacity, and community.**





Partnering For Success

Partnering with another local nonprofit organization can be mutually beneficial. Together, you can foster community engagement, social impact, and often, increased visibility for both organizations. Here are some tips to make the most out of such partnerships:

Identify Potential Partners

There are three types of partnerships that NAMI organizations can benefit from when conducting voter engagement activities:

- **Local and State Election Offices:** Having a contact at an election office is invaluable when questions or needs come up. Election officials appreciate when organizations reach out, utilize their resources, and provide voters with accurate information.
- **Voter Outreach Organizations:** Look for organizations that provide quality, nonpartisan voter engagement resources and are operating locally. These organizations may be able to provide additional tools, volunteers, or insight.
- **Existing Partners with Shared Goals:** Look to your NAMI's current nonprofit partners whose mission and goals align or whose community overlaps. You may be able to share resources or team up to better integrate voter messaging and activities.

Develop a Lasting Partnership

- **Open Communication:** Initiate a dialogue with the organization's leadership team to discuss potential partnership opportunities. Be transparent about your objectives, resources, and limitations. Listen actively to their needs and aspirations. Emphasize that your goal is to provide accurate, nonpartisan information to eligible voters, so they will have an easier time getting to the polls and casting a ballot.
- **Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly outline each partner's roles and responsibilities within the partnership. Establishing expectations upfront helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that both partners are committed to achieving common goals.
- **Collaborative Projects:** Brainstorm collaborative projects that leverage the strengths of both organizations. Whether it's hosting joint events, conducting community outreach, or launching fundraising campaigns, collaboration can amplify the impact of your efforts.
- **Promote Each Other:** Use your respective platforms to promote each other's initiatives and events. This could include sharing content on social media, featuring each other in newsletters, or co-branding marketing materials. Celebrate milestones and successes along the way. Recognize the achievements of both organizations and the positive impact of your partnership on the community.



Section 3: Talk to Voters

Tips for Successfully Engaging Voters

One of the reasons your NAMI is such a great resource for voter engagement is because of the relationship your organization has with your community. Your NAMI can use all the digital tools or talking points, but at the end of the day, voter engagement is a year-round initiative focused on talking directly with voters, building trust through relationships, and honest communication. Your NAMI can make a real difference.

Educate Voters About the Intersection of Voting and Mental Health

Voters may not make the connection on how their vote impacts the mental health services and supports they see locally. In the lead-up to the election, your NAMI can be the source of trustworthy information. Helpful resources are available at vote4mentalhealth.org/key-issues.

Promote the Pledge to #Vote4MentalHealth

NAMI has created the Pledge to #Vote4MentalHealth as a way to get people who care about mental health excited about the elections. A simple way to get your members and community engaged is to direct them to take the pledge, and they will then receive voting and registration reminders.

Share Information on Voting Options

Voting is no longer just done on Election Day. Your NAMI can share information on how to vote in person on Election Day as well as how to vote in person during early voting or vote-by-mail in your area. The rules differ state to state, so your NAMI can serve as a trusted resource to share information about their options — and how to exercise their right to vote safely.

Voting By Mail

Voting by mail options depend on your state. Several states have all mail-in ballot elections, meaning every registered voter will receive a ballot. Others may have no excuse absentee voting where you have to apply for a mail ballot, but all eligible voters can submit an application. There is also absentee voting, which requires that the voter list an excuse for an accepted reason.

Some Reasons Why Potential Voters May Choose to Vote by Mail:

- They will not be in their state or otherwise have access to their polling location on Election Day.
- It is the easiest way for them to cast their ballot.
- They have health concerns during the election (while this is a viable reason for wanting to vote by mail, check absentee ballot rules for accepted excuses).
- They are more comfortable reviewing and researching their ballot at home.

Voting Early In-Person

Many states offer options for voting in person at a polling location or voting center in the days or weeks ahead of the election. Hours, locations, and requirements for voting early vary greatly across states.

Some Reasons Why Potential Voters May Choose to Vote Early:

- They are not able to vote on Election Day due to work schedules, childcare, commute, etc.
- They want an in-person voting experience but would like to avoid crowds and long lines on Election Day.
- They are volunteering to assist potential voters on Election Day.
- Voting by mail is not an accessible option for them.
- They need assistance voting and are only able to cast a ballot at an accessible polling location.

Voting on Election Day

Going to the polls on an Election Day is the most common and most familiar way of voting. Potential voters are more likely to understand the process for casting their ballot on Election Day. We recommend encouraging voters to consider all of their options for voting, as well as sharing important information about where voters can look up their polling location and hours.

Some Reasons Why Potential Voters May Choose to Vote on Election Day:

- They have always voted on Election Day and are most comfortable with this method of voting.
- They want an Election Day in-person voting experience.
- They need assistance voting and are only able to cast a ballot at an accessible polling location.
- Voting by mail or voting early are not accessible options for them.

How a voter casts a ballot is ultimately up to them, but voting by mail and early voting are growing in popularity and may better fit the specific needs of the voter. However a person chooses to vote, it is important to make sure they are able to find out what is required to vote with each method of voting. Send voters to vote4mentalhealth.org to look up information specific to their state.

Help People Make a Plan to Vote

It can be hard for voters to remember all the dates, deadlines, and requirements in order to cast a ballot in the upcoming elections. A voting plan is a great way for your members to keep track of everything and map out a way to vote that works best for them. NAMI has resources available to help your community make a plan to #Vote4MentalHealth for the upcoming elections at vote4mentalhealth.org/plan.

Leverage Existing Events and Meetings

When engaging voters at events or meetings, use large signage to attract attention and engage voters. Banners, posters, balloons, and other decorations can make your NAMI's table visible. You can bring snacks or other freebies to encourage people to visit your table; however, you must legally give these out regardless of whether someone registers to vote or not.

Be proactive! Stand up, get out from behind the table, and greet people. When you're talking to somebody, offer them a pen and clipboard to fill out their information. Once they see how easy the form is, they're more likely to follow through with registration.

Keep It Nonpartisan

NAMI staff should be nonpartisan when representing the organization on site, at events, or when doing voter engagement activities. Staff cannot suggest which candidate to vote for or which political party to support.

Prepare for the conversations, including ones with people who are hesitant to participate. Here are some common responses to keep in your back pocket:

"I don't have time."

"I understand. It only takes a couple minutes and doing it now will save you time later. I can answer any of your questions and ensure it gets turned in according to state law."

"I don't want to register" or "I don't care about voting."

Respect their hesitancy. You can't convince everyone, but you'll get better at trying.

- *"Candidates pay more attention to communities where everyone's registered. They won't always do what we want, but they're less likely to ignore us if we register to vote."*
- Cite an important issue in the upcoming election. Give an example of what the city council, state legislature, or Congress might be voting on next year.
- Remind them that they won't be voting alone — they're voting with and for their families, neighbors, and community.

"I don't know any of the candidates."

Suggest that they look up a voter guide on Vote411.org or [BallotReady](https://BallotReady.org) or talk to family and friends. They might be able to find someone who can bring them up to speed.

For other common questions and response, see "What NAMI Leadership and Volunteers Can Say About Elections" on page 11.

Don't Forget Your NAMI's Staff

Give Paid Time Off to Vote

The inability to take time off to vote (or not being aware of time off to vote policies) can be a barrier for potential voters. While a little less than half of states require employers to offer paid time off to vote, the rest do not. Offering unpaid time off to vote can also help but makes employees choose between voting and their paycheck.

Your NAMI organization can make a difference by leading with policies that ensure all of your employees have access to the ballot box. In addition to publicizing election deadlines, helping voters make a plan, and encouraging folks to vote, make sure your staff are aware of your NAMI's time off to vote policies.

The Standard Elements of Any Time-Off-to-Vote Policy Include:

- A statement of support for active and engaged citizenship
- The number of hours granted, usually two hours with pay
- Time off granted if the employee does not have time to vote before or after work on Election Day and is unable to use or access an absentee/mail ballot or vote early
- A requirement that the employee notify their supervisor before the day of the election

Visit the [NOLO Law for All](#) website to review the minimum standards, if any, set for time off to vote in your state.

Sample Policy #1

Because *[Your NAMI Affiliate's Name]* has a continuing interest in encouraging active and engaged citizenship, you are urged to vote in local, state, and national elections either before or after work hours on Election Day or by voting early via mail or in-person. If you do not have sufficient time outside of working hours within which to vote, you will be allowed to take up to two hours off with pay for this purpose. Such time off should be taken at the beginning or end of your regular shift, whichever allows for more free time to vote.

To receive time off for voting, you must advise your supervisor that you will need time off at least *[two to five]* business days before the day of the election, receive approval from your supervisor, and present a voter's receipt to your supervisor. No action will be taken against any employee in any manner for requesting or taking any time off as provided for in this policy.

Sample Policy #2

[Your NAMI Affiliate's Name] encourages its employees to fulfill their civic responsibilities by participating in elections. Generally, employees are able to find time to vote either before or after their regular work schedule or vote by mail. If employees are unable to vote in an election during non-working hours, the company will grant up to two hours paid time off so that employees may vote.

Employees should request time off to vote from their advisor at least *[two to five]* working days prior to the day of the election. Advance notice is required so that the necessary time off can be scheduled at the beginning or end of the work shift, whichever provides the least disruption to the normal work schedule.

Ballot Measures

What is a Ballot Measure?

Ballot measures ask voters to vote on laws, bonding issues, or constitutional amendments. If the vote is on a proposed law, it's called a "ballot initiative." If the vote is on a law already passed by the legislature, it's called a "referendum."

Can a NAMI State Organization or NAMI Affiliate Take a Position For or Against a Ballot Measure?

Yes. Activity on ballot measures is lobbying — not electioneering. Ballot measure advocacy is an attempt to influence the passage or defeat of a law or constitutional amendment — not the election or defeat of a candidate. 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, like NAMI, may take sides on ballot measures as a lobbying activity, subject to normal limits on lobbying. Any organization or individual is free to express their opinion for or against a proposed law or constitutional amendment.

For statewide ballot measures, all advocacy should be coordinated with your NAMI State Organization.

What are Common Activities for Nonprofits on Ballot Measures?

Your NAMI organization can engage in a range of activities related to ballot measures such as making an endorsement, communicating your NAMI's position to the public, organizing volunteers to work on passage or defeat of an initiative, or hosting an educational forum or event. Your NAMI can also distribute neutral educational materials designed to inform the public about both sides of the question.

How Much Can a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Spend on Lobbying?

Your organization's spending limits depend on which test your NAMI chooses to measure lobbying.

- 1.If your NAMI has elected to measure its lobbying under the 501(h) expenditure test, you will have clearer guidance and can do more advocacy. Under this test, your NAMI can spend as much as 20% of your annual budget on lobbying, including influencing ballot questions or legislation. Filing the 501(h) form is generally recommended for NAMIs that do any significant amount of lobbying and advocacy.
- 2.If your NAMI has not filed the 501(h) form, your lobbying falls under the "insubstantial part test." In this case, your NAMI organization may only spend an "insubstantial" amount of money on lobbying efforts. "Insubstantial" is generally assumed to be 3-5% of annual spending.¹

Are There Any Spending Limits for Ballot Measure Advocacy?

There are no limits on spending on ballot measures, beyond the limits on lobbying discussed above. Some states require you to file an expenditure report if you devote substantial funds to ballot measure advocacy as, for example, a primary sponsor of a ballot measure or an active partner. Contact your state's campaign finance office for more information.

¹ [Lobbying Under the Insubstantial Part Test](https://afj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Lobbying-Under-the-Insubstantial-Part-Test-2.24.21.pdf), Bolder Advocacy, <https://afj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Lobbying-Under-the-Insubstantial-Part-Test-2.24.21.pdf>



Candidate Engagement

Sharing Your NAMI's Policy Ideas

Educating candidates about the wide range of policy issues that intersect with mental health and how they impact the people NAMI serves is an important step to ensure all candidates have a robust plan to address NAMI's priorities if elected.

Sharing your NAMI's policy ideas with a candidate is similar to how you would engage an elected official. Utilize email, in-person meetings, etc. to make them aware of NAMI's policy priorities. Additionally, be sure to engage ALL candidates when doing your outreach. Do not conduct research on behalf of a candidate or campaign or sign your NAMI affiliate's name on to their policy proposals or platforms.

Candidate Appearances at Your NAMI Event

During an election season, a candidate may appear at your NAMI event in one of three ways: 1) in their capacity as a candidate invited to your event, 2) in their capacity as a public figure invited to your event, or 3) as an uninvited attendee at a public event. Each scenario has different guidelines to ensure that their appearance remains nonpartisan.

1. Inviting Candidates to an Event in Their Capacity as Candidates

Your NAMI may want to invite candidates for office to a function or event to expose them to NAMI's work, develop relationships with future office holders, or for a purpose related to your ongoing programs.

If you invite all the candidates to the **SAME** event:

- Invite all candidates from all parties in the same race. They don't all have to come, but all must be invited.
- Remind candidates that they are attending as guests. Campaigning and political fundraising are prohibited.
- Remind the audience that it is a nonpartisan event.



If you invite candidates to appear at **DIFFERENT** events:

- Provide equal opportunity to candidates for the same office, including a similar time, venue, and presentation format.
- Prior to introducing the candidate, clarify for the audience that the appearance is not an endorsement and that there will be additional opportunities to meet the other candidates.

Keep in mind that elected officials are themselves candidates when they are running for re-election in a primary or general election. This is particularly important to remember in the last two months leading up to the election.

2. Inviting a Candidate to an Event in Their Capacity as a Public Figure

NAMI organizations may invite a candidate to an event in their capacity as a recognized public figure, like an elected official or expert in their field. You might invite a candidate to speak because he or she 1) currently holds, or formerly held, public office; 2) is considered an expert in a non-political field; 3) is a celebrity or has led a distinguished public service, military, legal, or other career. Under these circumstances only extend an invitation if:

- The candidate is chosen to speak solely for reasons other than their candidacy and speaks only in a non-candidate capacity.
- There is no mention of their candidacy during the presentation or event.
- The atmosphere is kept entirely nonpartisan and free of campaign activity (e.g. campaign brochures or other materials are not out on a table).

3. Candidates Attending Your Event on Their Own Initiative

Candidates may appear at a public event held by your NAMI organization on their own initiative. Take care that there is no actual or implied endorsement. Do not give the candidate an opportunity to address the gathering or distribute campaign literature.





Candidate Forums

Keeping Your Forum Nonpartisan

When planning your NAMI's candidate forum, remember — nonpartisanship is key! Not only is it required for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, it encourages attendance by candidates, attracts more interest from the media, and is an effective tool for engaging your community around the issues that matter most to people affected by mental health conditions.

Basic Guidelines for Staying Nonpartisan

- The forum should cover a broad range of issues.
- Candidates should have equal time to present their views.
- The candidates are asked about issues, but are not asked to pledge to or agree with specific policy positions of NAMIs or any of the sponsoring organizations.
- The moderator stays neutral and does not imply approval or disapproval of the candidates.

Staying nonpartisan is fairly straightforward. Here are some tried and true tips from the experts:

Inviting the Candidates

Invite all viable candidates for a specific office to your forum and make an equal effort to encourage each of them to attend. If it is a two-candidate race and only one agrees to attend, you should not go forward with your forum because it could be perceived as partisan with only one candidate.

Q. What about a race with several candidates?

At least two candidates must attend in order for the forum to remain nonpartisan. You may want to ensure the front runners can attend, but having any two or more candidates is enough to make it a nonpartisan forum.

Q. What about a last minute cancellation?

If it is a two-candidate race and one cancels with very little notice, or worse, doesn't show up, you may cancel or go forward with the candidate event as planned. If you go forward, make sure to announce that this in no way signifies the endorsement of the attending candidate by NAMI.

Questions Asked At the Forum

You may want to have one or more staff members in charge of reviewing audience questions before handing them to the moderator. Your forum should ask good and even pointed questions, but none that signal a strong bias for or against a candidate. It's ok to ask straightforward questions on the issues, but balance these across partisan lines.

Ground Rules Inside the Forum

Partisan Attire: While not required, you may want to ask audience members to check their partisan materials (including buttons and signs) at the door. This helps to create a sense of nonpartisanship within the forum hall.

The Audience: Ask the audience to respectfully refrain from excessive exuberance for or against a particular candidate.

Site Selection: Choose a neutral site for your forum — one that is not associated with any party, candidate, or strong political advocacy for any issue.

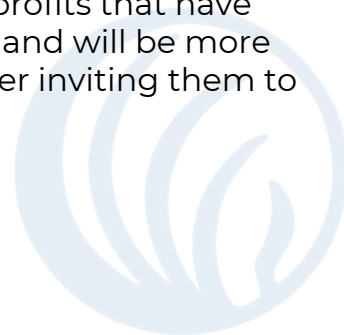
Literature

Your NAMI may provide nonpartisan voter education, voter registration, and get-out-the-vote materials for your audience. Have a separate table outside the room of the forum for candidates to place their campaign literature.

What the Candidates Want

It is helpful to understand what the candidates hope for in your NAMI's candidate forum. Use this information to entice candidates to attend.

- **A Large Audience!** Candidates are spread very thin during campaign season. They cannot attend every event to which they are invited. Your NAMI and your co-sponsoring organizations should focus on turnout to increase the chances that candidates will attend. This is a great opportunity to invite homeowners, volunteers, NAMI on Campus chapters or young professional groups, donors, and more to participate. Be sure to communicate your expected audience size to the candidates in advance, as a large turnout at your candidate forum demonstrates that your NAMI has influence on voters.
- **A Guarantee of Neutrality:** Candidates will avoid any event where they think they could be ganged up on — especially if the media is expected to attend. In all of your communications with the candidates, remind them of the nonpartisan nature of the forum and share any ground rules you have established to keep everything neutral.
- **A Trusted and Well-Respected Nonprofit in the District:** Leverage your NAMI's reputation as a respected community organization and partnerships with other nonprofits. Since candidates are aware of nonprofits that have held successful and neutral candidate forums in the past and will be more likely to attend if those organizations are involved, consider inviting them to become co-sponsors.



- **Time to Meet Informally with Voters:** Allow time after the forum for the candidates to speak one-on-one with voters and shake hands. Tell candidates about this opportunity in your invitation to them.
- **More Information About Your NAMI:** In your invitation to the candidates, briefly explain NAMI's mission and the community you serve as well as your NAMI's recent policy and advocacy campaigns. Many candidates and elected officials already rely on nonprofits as resources for policy information. This is a great opportunity to mention NAMI's policy priorities and the current issues that impact people with mental health conditions in your community.

Selecting a Format

At the top of your to-do list is selecting the format of your forum. As you decide, remember that it's important to select the option that best meets your community's needs.

Common Formats

- **Equal Time Q&A:** An impartial moderator and panelists question the candidates, who are allowed equal response time. Traditionally, the candidates are unaware of the exact questions but know the established focus of the program. Candidates may answer the same questions or may be asked different questions, as long as each is given equal time to present their point of view.
- **Follow-Up Q&A:** In this approach, the moderator and/or panelists ask the candidates questions. To get clarifications and more specific answers, follow-up questions are permitted.
- **Town Meeting Q&A:** Members of the audience ask all questions. Questions should be screened by a NAMI staff member in order to avoid partisan questions and to facilitate substantive dialogue. The audience members asking questions will educate the candidate on the concerns of the mental health community.
- **Prepared and Spontaneous Debate:** Prior to the forum, the candidates are presented with several prepared questions constructed to elicit detailed responses. A selection of these questions will be asked at the forum. Candidates will then be asked to give spontaneous answers to questions that originate with the moderator, their opponents, and/or the audience.

Ideally, you will begin planning your forum at least 4 months in advance. Shorter timelines can work, but make sure the date and location are set and candidates are confirmed with enough time to do thorough promotion. See the task checklist at nonprofitvote.org.



Publicizing Your Forum

- 1. Promote, promote, promote!** Use all your communication channels. Target and time your online and print communications to maximize impact. Post flyers and make details about the forum available.
- 2. Leverage partners and media outlets** that have featured your NAMI's work in the past.
- 3. Use key election dates or campaign news** to drive communications in the lead-up to the forum.
- 4. Try to personally contact local and regional media outlets.** Use the forum as a way to establish new relationships and raise your NAMI's profile.
- 5. Use a known moderator** to draw additional attention (ex. local news anchor, university professor, retired or former elected leader, or civic leaders who are not associated with a political party).
- 6. Your nonpartisanship is an advantage.** For the media and your audience, a forum is a chance to hear from candidates in a nonpartisan setting rather than hear stock messages from the campaign trail.
- 7. Frame your forum as a “community event”** — one that brings voters and residents together to engage in the democratic process and influence their government.

What NOT to Do When Planning a Forum

- Start planning late.
- Make assumptions about turnout (typically, actual attendees are half or less of RSVPs.)
- Over-rely on partners and co-sponsors for audience turnout without verifying their efforts. Social media posts are great for getting the word out, but relational organizing is the strongest tool for turnout.
- Send media releases without personal follow-up.
- Disregard media outlets in other languages common to your NAMI community.
- Forget good signage around the building so people know where the forum is (including parking, entrance, etc.).
- Forget to give instructions to your audience at the start about what will occur — who asks questions, when the audience participates and how, expected decorum, etc.





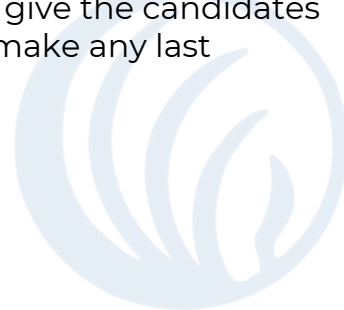
Candidate Questionnaires

Candidate questionnaires serve two purposes. First, they collect information about the candidates for voters. Second, they let candidates know the range of issues of concern to NAMI. Questionnaires do take time to prepare and require care to ensure they are nonpartisan. If you wish to do a candidate questionnaire, consider these key factors in determining whether a voter guide is nonpartisan:

- Do the questions cover a range of issues related to the broad interests of the electorate? For example, do the questions address a range of issues relevant to a specific elected office or reflect a truly broad range of concerns within your issue area?
- Are the questions or any description of the issues clear and unbiased in both structure and content?
- Are the questions posed to candidates identical to the questions you later publicly print or post online? (They should be.)
- Are the candidates given a reasonable amount of time to respond?
- If the questions ask the candidates to respond with “Yes” or “No” or “Undecided,” are candidates given the opportunity to give short one or two sentence explanations on their positions?
- Have all major candidates responded?

Q: What If the candidate does not respond?

You may list “Did Not Respond.” When a candidate fails to respond, some 501(c)(3) nonprofits choose to provide information about the candidate that is a matter of public record or on their website. If you do, be sure to stick to strictly factual information — name, address, etc. — and avoid efforts to summarize the candidate’s positions on issues, which might appear to be slanted to favor or disfavor the candidate. You should provide candidates a reasonable time period — for example, three weeks — to give their responses and information. As the deadline nears, let the candidates know that if they don’t respond, you will print “did not respond.” While not required, it is a good practice to give the candidates the chance to review the final draft of their information and make any last minute corrections.



Sample Mental Health-Related Candidate Questions

- More people than ever are recognizing the growing need for mental health services. How will you ensure mental health services are available to meet community needs?
- Fifty percent of all mental health conditions appear by age 14, and seventy-five percent by age 24, but only half receive treatment. What do you propose to ensure youth and young adults can access the mental health services and supports they need?
- There is a shortage of mental health professionals, meaning it's more challenging to find care when you need it. How would you address the mental health workforce shortage in our community?
- Lack of stable housing can be one of the biggest barriers to recovery. People struggle to engage in treatment without a safe place to live. How do you propose to address the lack of affordable housing for people with mental health conditions?
- People with mental health conditions are booked into our nation's jails and prisons two million times every year, many arrested because of the symptoms of their condition. In jail, people with mental health conditions tend to stay longer as their conditions worsen. What would you do to address this?
- When a person experiencing a mental health crisis needs in-person support, a law enforcement response increases the likelihood that they receive handcuffs, not help. What policies would you implement to ensure people in our community receive a mental health response?
- The unemployment rate for people with mental illness is higher than that of their peers without mental health conditions. Yet, many people with mental illness want to work — and can work with the right supports. How do you propose to help people with mental illness get and keep gainful employment?



A photograph showing a person in a wheelchair at a polling station. They are holding a document and looking at it. Another person is standing next to them, also looking at the document. A sign in the background says "POLLING PLACE".

Engaging Potential Voters With Disabilities

A disability includes any condition that significantly impacts a person's life activities. This can include matters of mobility, cognition, hearing, and/or vision. Any of these can impact the ability to vote in unique ways. If people with disabilities voted at the same rate as people without disabilities who have the same demographic characteristics, there would be about 1.75 million more voters. The landmark *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* required states to make voting more accessible. Since then, other laws such as the *Help Americans Vote Act of 2002* have continued these efforts. Despite this, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to voting. In 2022, voters with disabilities were three times more likely to have some type of difficulty in voting than people without disabilities.

Strategies for Making Voter Engagement Activities More Accessible

Use Multiple Formats in Different Mediums

Make any needed adjustments for the physical and digital space in which voter registration is done. This may mean multiple formats in various visual, auditory, and tactile mediums. For visual information and forms, you may want to provide both paper printouts and digital devices, so screen readers can be utilized.

- Hosting a webinar on voting information? Be sure to turn on captioning.
- Posting an image to social media? Be sure to use the "alt tag" features.
- Use free online tools to simplify language or check for color contrast to ensure readability.

Visualizing and Walking Through the Steps to Vote

One way to help people with disabilities is in preparing to vote — from making sure voter information is clear and understandable to addressing potential concerns. How will the voter get to the polling place? If driving, will there be accessible parking? Will the pathways to the entrance be accessible and clearly marked? How will the doors open?

- Visiting the site in advance can help voters get a feel for the location and identify any areas of concern. This is particularly helpful if they are a first-time voter or if a polling place has recently changed.
- Any issues can be shared with the local county election office, which can be an ally in making sure accessibility requirements for polling places are met. Frame it as, "We want to help make sure everyone can vote."
- Try reaching out to the local election office to do a demonstration, so voters can experience the actual voting machine that will be used.

By better understanding the full range of possible disabilities and appropriate accommodations, NAMI staff can help address some of the barriers to voter registration and education, while maintaining dignity and independence for people with disabilities.



Voting and Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness or who are otherwise in transition face special challenges when registering to vote. Remember, the best source of information about these issues is your state or county election officials.

Can someone who is homeless register and vote?

Yes. Someone experiencing homelessness can register and vote in all 50 states.

What should be the listed home address?

It is recommended that people experiencing homelessness list a shelter address as their voting address where they could receive mail when registering. Alternatively, someone may denote a street corner or a park as their residence, in lieu of a traditional home address. The federal voter registration form and many state forms provide a space for this purpose.

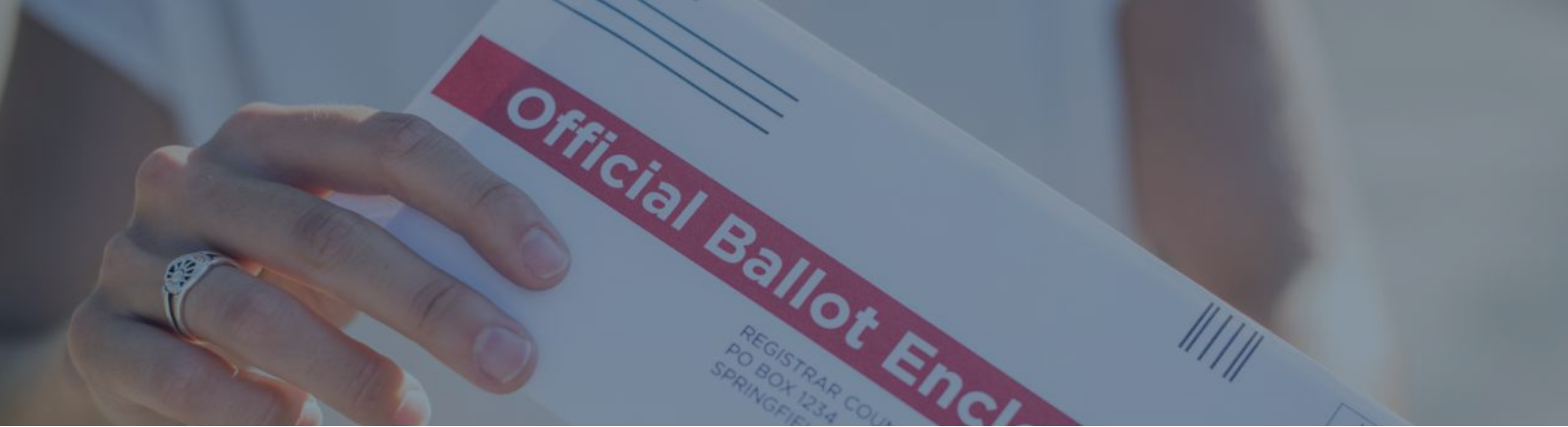
Does someone have to have lived at this location for any particular length of time?

Most states have some duration of residency requirements for voter registration — for example, having resided for 30 days or more before the Election Day in the state or county. Contact your local elections officials to find out what the rules are in your state.

Where can I find more information on registration and voting for the homeless?

For further information about registration and voting, The National Coalition for the Homeless provides extensive information in their [**You Don't Need a Home to Vote**](#) campaign. The [**National Alliance to End Homelessness**](#) has a toolkit that may also be helpful.





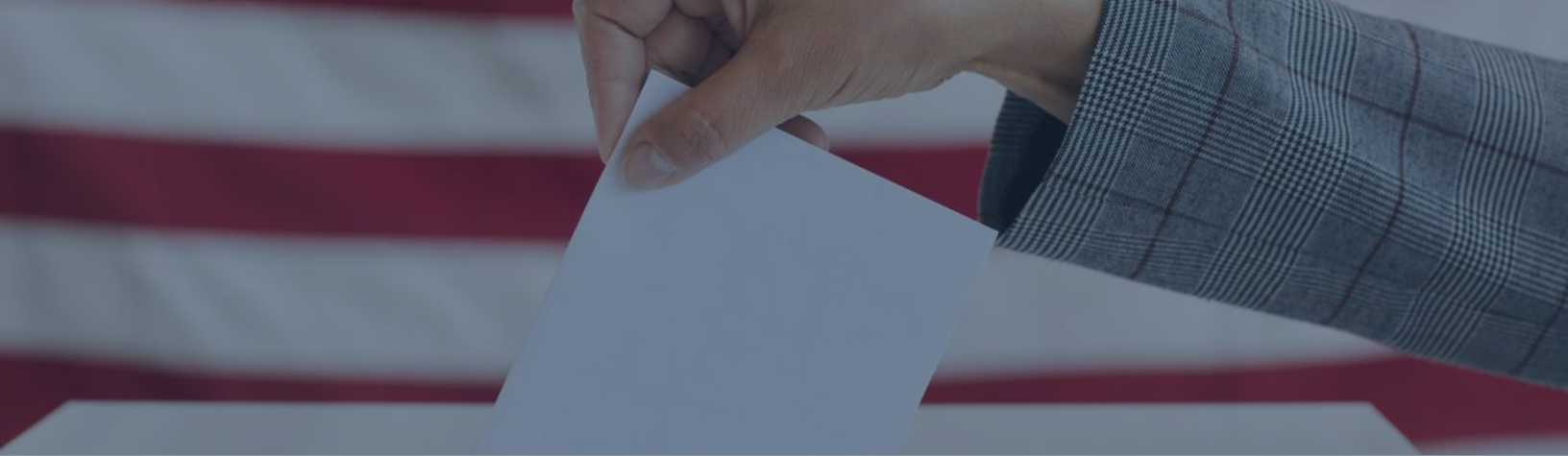
Self-Care During Election Season

While your NAMI is making mental health a priority at the ballot box, you also need to make mental health a priority for your staff, volunteers, leadership, and anyone else involved in your NAMI's voter engagement activities. Election season can be stressful: the constant news updates, difficult conversations with friends and family members, and negative ads featured anywhere you are and everywhere you go. This is why it's so important to practice self-care during election season. Consider these tips and tricks to manage election-related stress.

- **Get election news and updates from nonpartisan sources.** Media outlets with partisan views tend to have more sensationalized coverage and overemphasize the bad things another candidate may or may not do. Follow trusted news sources like the Associated Press or NPR, where the news will be reported in a balanced and factual way.
- **Silence breaking news notifications or delete news apps.** While it's important to stay informed, consider turning off push notifications for breaking news. Instead, intentionally visit a news website or subscribe to daily newsletters. Make sure you allow yourself to take a break from the news when you need to.
- **Take breaks from screens.** Avoid “doomscrolling” — scrolling through social media and news feeds, where there's always something new and negative to be found. Consider limiting your time on social media platforms in addition to news apps, or keeping your phone in a different room while you sleep.
- **Acknowledge your negative feelings.** Recognize what specifically is causing your heightened stress or emotions and find what you need to feel better.
- **Show yourself compassion.** You are not alone in feeling stressed or overwhelmed during election season. If you feel comfortable, talk with friends, family, or professionals for support.

You can always reach out to the NAMI HelpLine by calling 1-800-950-6264, texting “NAMI” to 62640, or emailing helpline@nami.org. Trained specialists are available Monday - Friday, 10 a.m. - 10 p.m. ET.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in a crisis, help is available. Anyone can call, text, or [chat 988](#) and be connected to trained crisis counselors within the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Additional Resources

General Resources:



Nonprofit VOTE — Get webinars, fact sheets, and support for nonpartisan voter engagement.



Bolder Advocacy/Alliance for Justice — Find answers to questions about nonpartisanship through their library of factsheets or by contacting their technical assistance team.



U.S. Vote Foundation — A directory of local election offices and their contact information.



National Conference of State Legislatures — Learn even more about election issues, including 50-state surveys on state laws, legislation databases, podcasts, and webinars.

Nonpartisan Voter Information (National):



Vote.gov — National governmental website for the most direct access to accurate voter registration and election information.



Vote411 — Provided by League of Women Voters, a decades old organization providing nonpartisan voter information.

National Civic Holidays:

National Voter Registration Day

National Voter Education Week

Vote Early Day

NAMI Resources:

Vote4MentalHealth.org: A nonpartisan campaign led by NAMI to promote voter participation and elevate discussions about mental health policy during elections. Learn more about key mental health issues and get resources to help your NAMI engage voters.