

## Guidelines for offering NAMI programs online during COVID-19 outbreak

The national education department understands that NAMI state organizations and affiliates are making accommodations in their programming by offering NAMI presentations, classes, and support groups online during the COVID-19 outbreak; we are heartened by your efforts to serve your communities. We often get asked about offering NAMI programs through online platforms and we would like to help you make informed, safe, and mindful decisions.

We would like to support you during this time by offering feedback on how to offer NAMI programs online while keeping with fidelity and providing a quality experience for your program leaders and participants.

There are several things to be mindful of if you are planning to offer NAMI programs online:

- 1) **Data/Privacy:** how will we protect attendees' privacy?
  - a. Each online platform has a terms of use and privacy policy. Be aware of the data the online platform is collecting about users and how this data will be stored and used. Program attendees should be made aware of these things before participating.
  - b. Confidentiality and anonymity can be difficult to ensure online. Allow too much anonymity and you risk having attendees who are there to heckle or bully anonymously or not being able to follow up with attendees who are in danger. Allow too little anonymity and you risk attendees feeling exposed and uncertain about confidentiality (e.g. how do I know this isn't being recorded?).
  - c. Like in-person NAMI programs, all attendees should be made aware of when confidentiality can be broken (e.g. mandated reporting) and the hosting affiliate/state should have a policy of how to follow up with that individual.
  
- 2) **Safety:** how will we ensure attendees' safety?
  - a. As stated above, the hosting affiliate/state should have the means for contacting and supporting attendees if they are a danger to themselves or others. This may mean collecting information that can help you locate them (e.g. zip code) or emergency contact information. This may also mean knowing how to access crisis resources and mobilize them when necessary (e.g. sending a crisis team to an individual's location). All attendees should be made aware of how and when this information will be used.
  - b. Being online offers people anonymity, which increases the risk of "trolls" or people who attend only to heckle or bully other attendees. The hosting

affiliate/state must have a plan in place to deal with this possibility, such as a way to permanently ban certain users or IP addresses.

3) **Logistics:** how will we provide a quality experience for attendees?

- a. Like in-person NAMI programs, these online sessions should always be led by at least two program leaders. This allows program leaders to tag-team in difficult situations, such as a physical or mental health emergency with an attendee.
- b. There should always be at least one host who is well versed in the online platform and who can troubleshoot technology issues as they arise. This can include helping attendees log in effectively, muting interference from other lines, etc.
- c. A quality online experience should have both visuals and audio, as well as diverse ways for attendees to participate (e.g. talk, type in chat, use “raise hand” icons). This prevents the things that too often decrease the quality of online experiences, such as people talking over each other and people being confused about what’s being talked about. For example, in keeping with fidelity, NAMI support groups should have a way to have the charts present at all times (e.g. a PowerPoint that’s being shared) so that the facilitators do not confuse the attendees.

## **Presentations**

NAMI presentations may be offered via an online platform if the venue is closed, large gatherings are prohibited, or attendees/presenters do not feel comfortable with an in-person gathering. All presentations must be done live to offer a facilitated Q&A period and audience engagement. NAMI state organizations and affiliates are not permitted to offer recordings of NAMI presentations to venues or organizations or record presentations for future use.

## **Classes**

NAMI classes may also be done using an online platform during this time. We ask that you remain mindful of the general guidelines provided to offer a quality and safe experience. Program manuals are available in electronic format in the NAMI store and may be given to participants; if you have access to a PDF editing software, we recommend giving this manual to participants in chunks, much like you would in an in-person experience. Please contact your NAMI state organization for the authorization codes for the [NAMI store](#). NAMI state organizations and affiliates are not allowed to record classes because it violates confidentiality of participants.

## Support Groups

As with the other programs, we understand the desire to offer NAMI support groups online during the COVID-19 outbreak. The general guidelines apply to NAMI support groups to ensure the confidentiality and safety of each attendee. To keep with fidelity, facilitators are encouraged to use a platform that allows for screen sharing and host-only private chatting. Screen sharing will allow the facilitator to share the charts with attendees. Host-only private chatting can serve as a way for facilitators to pull attendees “out of the group” in case of emergencies, and private chatting should be host-only to prevent side conversations between attendees. NAMI state organizations and affiliates are not allowed to record support groups because it violates confidentiality of participants (see data/privacy in message below).

We would like to share examples of keeping with fidelity from NAMI Texas, who has created PowerPoints with the Agenda script and the charts. We are deeply grateful to NAMI Texas for allowing us to share this resource. You will need to customize this for your state or affiliate. If you would like to create your own resource for screen-sharing, the charts are available in electronic format on the [NAMI Extranet](#). Please contact [namieducation@nami.org](mailto:namieducation@nami.org) for the PowerPoints by NAMI Texas.

Offering in-person NAMI programs online does come with challenges and does not always result in the most quality experience. That being said, we understand the need for flexibility during this time and would like to assist you in honoring fidelity, safety, and mindfulness as you go through daily operations.

Thank you considering these things when serving your communities. Should you have any questions about this message, please send your inquiry to [namieducation@nami.org](mailto:namieducation@nami.org) and we will triage it to the appropriate staff member. Please let us know how or if we can be of service to you during this stressful time.