

**NAMI ILLINOIS: HOW MEMBERS DETERMINE IF THEIR AFFILIATE IS
EFFECTIVE.**

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Summary:

This study examined how members of NAMI affiliates determine if their local affiliate is effective and what factors influence these perceptions. Four affiliates from NAMI Illinois participated in the study. Two of these affiliates had paid staff and two were led by volunteers. Four stakeholder groups were identified within these affiliates: consumers, family members, board members, and professionals.

Interviews with key informants from each affiliate's stakeholder group were conducted. From these interviews, a questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire asked members to rate the importance of certain effectiveness criteria as well as the importance of certain benefits and costs of being a NAMI affiliate member. A total of 770 members were surveyed and the study resulted in an impressive response rate of 35%.

The criteria members use to assess the effectiveness of their NAMI affiliate are represented by four categories: external liaisons, internal procedures, membership, and interest in members. The benefits of membership are represented by three categories: social benefits, material benefits, and advocacy benefits. Lastly, two costs were associated with NAMI affiliate membership: organizational costs and personal costs.

Further analysis identified what factors influence the importance of certain effectiveness criteria. Three findings were significant. First, board members had significantly different perceptions about the importance of certain effectiveness criteria than other members. Second, the benefits of being a NAMI affiliate member were most often associated with the importance of effectiveness criteria. In other words, the reason why someone joins or remains a member is directly related to how they determine if the affiliate is effective. Third, members from an affiliate with volunteer leadership had the same expectations of affiliate effectiveness than members of an affiliate with paid staff.

This report provides a summary of these findings. The accompanying recommendations come from three sources: interviews with current NAMI Illinois members, the researcher's 10 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, and an exhaustive literature review of nonprofits and self-help groups.

Effectiveness Categories

1. External Liaisons
2. Internal Procedures
3. Membership Numbers
4. Interest in Members

Benefits of Membership

1. Social Benefits
2. Material Benefits
3. Advocacy Benefits

Costs of Membership

1. Organizational Costs
2. Personal Benefits

Identification of Effectiveness Indicators

Effectiveness Indicators

The significant indicators of effectiveness are identified in the chart below. These indicators are represented by four categories: external liaisons, internal procedures, membership numbers, and interest in members.

Within these categories, five items were rated most important:

1. Opportunities to share experiences
2. Presentation of research by experts
3. Referrals by providers
4. Visits to legislators
5. Number of speaking engagements

Indicators of Effectiveness	
Opportunities to share experiences	93%
Presentation of research by experts	92%
Referrals by providers	78%
Visits to legislators	77%
Number of speaking events	75%
Increased funding	73%
Membership numbers	72%
Number of active members	72%
Number of times in media	71%
Formal planning	71%
Referrals to providers	69%
Nonmembers attend events	68%
Partner with others agencies	66%
Diverse recruitment	64%
Separate meetings for social & education	64%
Turnover rate	63%
Measure member satisfaction	63%
Communication medium other than newsletter	63%
Board member presence outside of board meetings	62%
Presence of office	61%
Presence of paid staff	50%
Formal mentors assigned	48%
Use of membership cards	19%

The importance of these effectiveness indicators suggest that affiliates need to be equipped with the ability to address issues related to these indicators such as:

- Program planning
 - Use of annual plan of work
 - Include presentation of research and opportunities to share within program plan
 - Use of separate volunteers to plan/lead sharing (support) and research-oriented (education) events

- Volunteer Management
 - Recognize importance of volunteer involvement
 - Identifying opportunities for volunteer involvement
 - Volunteer recruitment and orientation

- Outreach/Public speaking
 - Identification of speaking venues (association of providers, universities, etc..)
 - Pre-packaged NAMI Illinois presentation, fact sheets
 - Fact sheets regarding public speaking tips

- Public Relations
 - Monthly newsreleases from state office to affiliates
 - Pre-packaged media/advocacy packets for local media and legislators
 - Use of media advisories when appropriate

- Fundraising
 - Direct mail versus event fundraising
 - In-kind recruitment and acknowledgement

- Membership Management
 - Database management of members and volunteers (ACCESS at minimum)

Identification of Benefits and Costs of Membership

One goal of this study was to identify the factors that influence the importance of effectiveness criteria. One perspective on membership associations is the influence of the costs and benefits of membership. The second part of this report will identify the perceived benefits and costs of membership as identified by respondents.

Benefits of Membership

The perceived benefits of membership are identified in the chart below. These benefits are represented by three categories: social benefits, material benefits, and advocacy benefits.

Within these categories, five items were rated the most important:

1. Increased knowledge about mental illness in general
2. Information about events
3. Information about prescriptions and illnesses
4. Influence in changing mental health system
5. Increased coping skills

Benefits of Membership	
Increased knowledge about mental illness in general	94%
Information about events	92%
Information about prescriptions and illnesses	91%
Influence in changing the mental health system	89%
Increased coping skills	84%
Learn about others' experiences	83%
Advocate for specific piece of legislation	81%
Referral to services	80%
Feeling like I am not alone	79%
Give back to the organization that helped me	76%
Obligation to help others going through what I went through	73%
Work for a cause I support	68%
Tell others about my experiences	63%
Friendships with other members	62%
Meet with legislators as part of a group	49%

The importance of these benefits suggests that affiliates need to be equipped with the ability to assess and address these benefits.

- Assessment of benefits
 - Formal assessment of member entry and retention

- Educational & Skill building opportunities
 - Planned educational events throughout the year
 - Skill-building workshops such as:
 - a. List of questions to ask health care provider with role playing
 - b. List of questions to ask attorney with role playing
 - c. Meditation/relaxation workshops
 - d. Depression screening clinics and workshops
 - e. Coping (Stress management) workshops

- Advocacy opportunities
 - Feeling more prepared with mental illness and health care statistics when we visit our legislators
 - Planned visits to our legislators as a group

- Support opportunities
 - Continuation of support group meetings
 - Social outings for members

Costs of Membership

The perceived costs of membership are identified in the chart below. These costs are represented by two categories: organizational and personal costs.

Costs of Membership	
Move away from affiliate	58%
Energy drain from focus on mental illness	57%
Disagreeing with goals of affiliate	56%
Not feeling welcome at affiliate functions	52%
Denial of illness	45%
Lose interest in mental illness	42%
Give up hope of coping with mental illness	42%
Busy with other activities	41%
Not involved in affiliate activities	39%
Loved one passes away	35%
Not getting along with other members	31%
Cost of NAMI membership	25%
Stigma of mental illness	19%

The costs identified by members were not as significantly strong as the benefits and effectiveness indicators. This may be due to the fact that current members were asked to rate how important items would be in causing them to drop out. The questionnaire did not ask past members what caused them to drop out. This may account for the strength of these items not being as significant as the benefits and effectiveness indicators.

While the importance of these costs was not as statistically significant, it is important to acknowledge that the costs were identified as possible influences to leaving an affiliate. Some suggestions for addressing these costs are:

- Personal Costs
 - Help connect members to new affiliate if they move
 - Provide social or fun activities to involve members without intense focus on mental illness

- Organizational Costs
 - Gain input from members in the planning and goals of the affiliate
 - Make concentrated effort to ensure affiliate functions are welcoming and inclusive and does not endorse 'cliques'
 - Provide affiliate activities at different times of the day and/or week to work around schedules of people

Influences to Effectiveness Indicators

1. Board Members had significantly different perceptions than other members.

- a. Board members rated criteria related to membership numbers more importantly than family members and consumer members did.
- b. Board members rated criteria related to membership satisfaction and mentoring less important than consumer members did.

There is a discrepancy between board member and lay membership interests. Board members naturally rate membership numbers important because of their role in affiliate development. However, criteria related to the interest in membership such as measuring member satisfaction and assigning formal mentors are more important to other members. Board members should acknowledge this discrepancy and make a concentrated effort to address the interest of the lay membership. These items may affect the ability to retain members.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Have systematic way of gathering input from all members such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews.
- ❖ Program according to member input in order to retain members.

2. The benefits and costs of membership were most often associated with importance of effectiveness criteria. In other words, why people choose to join an affiliate is most often associated with how they determine if that affiliate is effective.

- a. Benefits related to advocacy efforts were related to the importance of internal/board procedures and membership numbers.
- b. Benefits related to social activities were related to importance of internal/board procedures.
- c. Organizational costs were related to importance of membership criteria.
- d. Personal costs were related to the importance of criteria related to interest in members such as measuring member satisfaction and assigning formal mentors.

Why someone joins or leaves the affiliate is directly related to how they determine if the affiliate is effective. While this appears like common sense, how many affiliates have a systematic way of assessing why their members join or leave? Keeping track of these benefits and costs will help with member recruitment and retention.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Have a systematic way of assessing why people join the affiliate (entrance survey).
- ❖ Have a systematic way of assessing why people remain in the affiliate (retention survey).
- ❖ Have a systematic way of assessing why people drop out of the affiliate (exit survey).

3. Members that belong to an affiliate with volunteer leadership have the same expectations of affiliate effectiveness than members that belong to an affiliate with paid staff.

- a. There was no difference in the importance of effectiveness criteria between members from an affiliate with paid staff than members from an affiliate with volunteer leadership.

While no effort was made to distinguish between the number of paid staff an affiliate had, there was no significant difference found between the two types of affiliates. This suggests that members who belong to affiliates with paid staff do not have different perceptions about the types of criteria needed to make an affiliate effective than members from a volunteer-led affiliate.

Recommendations:

- ❖ If categories or dimensions of effectiveness can be found to exist across affiliate types then statewide planning, training, and evaluation can be developed to assist affiliates.
- ❖ One component of nonprofit sustainability is to make sure that staff have not only the commitment but the skills to deliver the programs. This finding suggests that affiliate leaders need to be provided the support to conduct program planning, evaluation, fundraising, and marketing efforts regardless of staffing structure.