

Rabbi Sandra Cohen
Nominated by NAMI Colorado

CANDIDATE NARRATIVE

Strengths and attributes the NAMI Board has identified as high priority needs for the 2021-2022 board; any strengths/attributes identified by the candidate are starred and in bold:

- **Diversity of age, race, ethnicity, language, experience and national geography****
- Knowledge of the philanthropic community and track record with donor cultivation
- Experience with a variety of revenue models and financial oversight and management
- **Human capital management including professional experience in human resources and personnel development & management****
- Legal and risk management
- Criminal Justice experience, professional and/or lived

In 250 words or less, please explain how you will use your skills in the above areas to move the mission of the NAMI Board forward. If you do not have any experience in these areas, please explain what qualities you possess that the NAMI Board of Directors should consider when making their recommendations to the membership.

As a rabbi who has worked for several years on mental health outreach in the Jewish and other religious communities, and who personally has a mental illness (bipolar, depression), I believe I have unique qualifications to serve on the NAMI board. When asking about diversity, NAMI lists race, ethnicity, age, and national aspects (as well as a few other), but does not mention religious diversity. This, I believe, is a mistake. Around 80% of people with mental illness describe themselves as "spiritual," and around 60% go to their clergy person or religious community for help. I can help NAMI reach out to religious communities of all sorts, from Jewish to Muslim, from Hindu and Bahai to Christians and Buddhists. Rather than imposing programs from without, I believe in working with faith communities on understanding their core values, and then using those values, such as visiting the sick and welcoming the stranger, to aid the institution in creating mental health committees and mental health programming. Places of worship can serve as frontline help, through, for example, providing mental health resource information in bathrooms and lobbies and created spiritual support groups; they can help individuals and families with practical help and they can also refer to places like NAMI and its support groups. I believe it is time for NAMI to partner with religious groups as a way of reaching more people.

I have personally helped advance the NAMI mission in my community by...

I have personally helped advance the NAMI mission in my community by walking NAMI walks, publicizing its mission in Jewish and other religious communities, referring people to NAMI who need support and, of course, with donations.

I work well in coordination with other leaders to accomplish goals as evidenced by...

I work well in coordination with other leaders to accomplish goals as evidenced by my success in growing a small congregation from 80 families to 140 over the course of 4 ½ years, as well as my work with other rabbis on the Rabbinical Council, specifically in interfaith work and bringing rabbis together for common purposes, like communal education and religious programming.

NOMINATOR NARRATIVE

Ray Merenstein
Executive Director, NAMI Colorado

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Rabbi Cohen's lifelong career embraces inclusivity and equity. She has sought to provide safe havens to those struggling with mental illness, those looking for faith-based home, individuals stigmatized for LGBTQ affiliation and more. She brings a particular understanding of co-occurring disorders of mental and physical illness as a stroke survivor and will be a bridge to conversations, legislation and awareness of those struggling with depression or bipolar tied to a medical condition or triggered by it.

Rabbi Cohen also leads by example when it comes to philanthropy. She and her husband are generous donors to national, regional and local organizations, including those that help the homeless, criminal justice, social justice, interfaith and mental health. A NAMIWalk participant, she raised \$1,000+ utilizing personal outreach and social media. She will happily go on an "an ask visit" as well as share personal testimony front and center about her own mental health struggles and her family's.

Rabbi Cohen also has served on Executive Committees of various boards and a founder of an inter-cultural organization bringing next generation Israelis and Palestinians together. This has given her a deep understanding of non-profit budgets ranging from startups to 100+ year synagogues with very robust membership. She does not hesitate to ask tough questions related to budget issues or to make suggestions on other innovative ways to drive revenue. Her particular experience in clergy gives her an innate understanding of membership-based organizations, important for NAMI, of course.

This individual has helped advance the NAMI mission in my community by...

Being vocal about her owned lived experience. She was among the first of community leaders to use her voice and position to advocate for ending stigmatization and securing resources for those living with mental illness and their families. As a mother of an LGBTQA identified young adult, Rabbi Cohen has given voice to marginalized and at-risk communities. Rabbi Cohen has long been a participant in mental health month, creation of committees and task forces on mental health, and inter-faith efforts to raise the role of churches, synagogues and mosques in promoting mental health.

This individual works well in coordination with other leaders to accomplish goals as evidenced by...

...a sense of embracing where people want to be a part of an effort, a cause, an organization that includes Rabbi Cohen's passion, intelligence and drive. Rabbi Cohen, as a career educator in social justice, interfaith, mental health and family relations has a deep understanding of meeting people where they are and embracing them with the love, support and direction they need. She validates the individual with LEAP and other

techniques gained over the years and by being able to share her lived experience. She played a lead role in the Interfaith Alliance and the Rocky Mountain Rabbinic Council proving diverse views can come together as one for shared goals.