

## **CREATING A LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST FOR MENTAL HEALTH (9-20-08 version)**

*This document is a work in progress, please send your feedback, ideas for improvement, or questions to [LisaFHamill@gmail.com](mailto:LisaFHamill@gmail.com) or call 919-933-8941*

A Legislative Breakfast for Mental Health can involve meeting one or more of your Legislators for breakfast with a few NAMI members or it can involve a larger event, such as this document outlines. The important thing to keep in mind is not whether it's a small or a large event - it's making a connection with your legislators to help them understand the importance of mental health related issues.

This is an example of a comprehensive plan with suggested guidelines, steps and advice to help create a Legislative Breakfast on Mental Health in your area. Each legislative district is different. Some suggestions may not apply or will need to be revised to fit your specific situation. This plan can easily be edited to create a simplified check list. Although this plan lists tasks in numerical order, many of these tasks will be occurring simultaneously.

### **IMPLEMENTATION- COMMITTEE DESIGN**

**Create clear job descriptions and specific directions and deadlines for accomplishing all of the various tasks that have to be done throughout the planning process.**

If everyone on the committee does their work between meetings, the meeting can consist of reports on progress made and hopefully avoid problems of tasks not getting done, or having to be completed at the last minute. If a committee member is unable to take care of job responsibilities, they should delegate to someone else or let committee know in a timely manner.

### **COMMITTEE CHAIR or CO-CHAIRS**

Having a clearly appointed chairperson is a necessity. One possibility is for committee to have co-chairs to share the responsibility and work. Co-chairs could divide the work, cover for each other when there are the inevitable schedule conflicts, and support each other through the planning, organizing, and implementation process. Make sure that people have someone to call if they have questions or run into complications.

Chair responsibilities could include: facilitating meetings, soliciting input for meeting agendas, communicating w/ committee members about upcoming meetings & meeting reminders. Setting up meetings -preferably with a representative from all sponsor organizations and including two representatives with prior Legislative Breakfast organizing experience. Chair should respect the input of all parties and encourage everyone to participate and to be heard.

**SECRETARY**-Take minutes at meetings and keep ongoing task/responsibilities/deadlines list for each committee member/volunteer as reminders and send out with meeting minutes to ensure tasks are done correctly and in a timely manner. Co-chairs could possibly alternate serving as secretary.

**MEDIA** - Decide who/what organization will be the contact person for the press and/or to call for information. Have someone designated to be "on message" to talk to reporters. Include county and regional papers, have press liaison give hand out to press with facts, important concerns and solutions, etc. Lay out issues and suggestions for improvement. Possibly create a marketing committee to publicize event more widely and to contact media. Publicize every way possible via newsletters, email lists, newspapers, posting flyers, etc. Publicity could include doing radio or public access TV public service announcements and inviting reporters to attend and write articles on event.

**RSVP's**-Decide if RSVP's are optional or necessary and who can keep track of RSVP's. A spreadsheet listing name, address, and email is helpful and can serve as a mailing list for future events.

**LEGISLATIVE MATERIALS**- Carefully review any written material prepared for legislators for errors/typos and be prepared to answer legislator's questions. Send info to legislators in advance for their review. Give legislators feedback forms at event or email them to get their feedback and opinions on event. Have pre-printed name tags for Legislators. Possibly have note cards or pre-printed postcards available for attendees to send a message to non-attending legislators.

**PROGRAM**- Have an advance copy of program and materials available for review at last committee meeting before Legislative Breakfast to allow proofreading prior to printing materials for event. Possibly include an Action Alert for audience included with program if a timely issue needs attention.

**EVENT LOCATION LIAISON and SET UP**- Review all details at last pre-event mtg. Have all location info written down, including name and phone number of person responsible for unlocking building and if chairs or tables are locked up in storage be sure that someone will have the key. Make arrangements for audio tape or videotaping well in advance. Make sure the room is set up with adequate access aisles between the chair rows. Try to use a raised platform to allow all audience members to see guest speakers. When legislators are speaking ask them to stand up so audience knows who is speaking. Arrange access for set up at least 1 ½ hours before event begins and have a quick volunteer meeting to review roles and call volunteers if they haven't shown up.

**FACILITATOR**- Email facilitator a detailed program with his/her specific tasks listed in advance of the breakfast. Have a backup facilitator lined up in case assigned facilitator is unable to make it at the last minute.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Have a volunteer coordinator do reminder calls and/or email ~5 days before the legislative Breakfast to confirm volunteers will be at event. Email volunteers a detailed program with their specific tasks listed in advance of the breakfast. At event, volunteer coordinator ensures all volunteers are where they should be and doing their tasks as defined. Start recruiting volunteers at least 4 weeks before event to find enough volunteers. Have extra volunteers lined up in case some volunteers don't show up.

Have all volunteers meet 1 hr before event begins to review their roles/tasks. Be sure to have cell phone or other phone numbers for all volunteers on the volunteer schedule at the event in case they need to be contacted and give volunteers a cell phone number they can call to reach the volunteer coordinator if they are running late or unexpectedly unable to make it to the LB.

## **RSVP**

Designate a specific person to be responsible for keeping track of RSVP's and be sure to keep track of numbers in case capacity is reached and a standby list needs to be compiled. Reminder calls or emails to RSVP's should be done around 2-3 days before the Legislative Breakfast.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL TASKS and TIMELINE**

1) Decide on and invite co-sponsors, such as other NAMI affiliates, rehabilitation organizations, such as Caramore Community, Psychosocial Rehabilitation Clubhouses, or other non-profits with mental health related missions. Collaborating with other groups helps to share the cost and brings in a larger

audience. Some mental health related organizations, such as Local Management Entities or mental health service providers, may not be a good fit as co-sponsors due to potential conflicts of interest.

2) Evaluate what your goals are (publicize issues, dispel stigma, provide info on specific mental health topics, educate audience & legislators, inspire audience to become advocates, boost morale, bring attention to concerns pertaining to NC. Div. MH/DD/SA or LME's, strengthen your organization). Then choose a topic, theme, title and speaker(s) and create a marketing/publicity theme/title/plan that will bring in a good audience and is a match with your goals. Previous Legislative Breakfast themes/titles/speakers are included at the end of this document.

Create a budget and select an organization to be the "Payee Organization" to deposit the donations and pay the bills. Decide if attendees should be encouraged to make donations at event or have a set amount that will be charged, possibly with scholarships available.

3) Set the date and the beginning and ending times. One option would be to poll legislators to find out what date works best for most. Contact info for your legislators is available at: <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/> Try to set up a few possible dates with your keynote speaker, then match which date works for most legislators. Try to avoid weekends of religious and nonreligious holidays, Memorial Day, graduation-if in a college town area- and the weekend before the Primary Election which is held in odd numbered years.

After the Legislative session begins legislators have more hectic schedules. The Legislative calendar may include unscheduled sessions held on Saturdays, the best day to hold a Legislative Breakfast, which is why it is preferable to hold your event before the session begins or at least shortly after. It is also valuable for legislators to be aware of mental health issues in advance of the session.

During even numbered years, the short session starts in early May. Theoretically the Legislature meets only to adjust the budget passed in the previous odd numbered session, depending on revenues. They can also take up any bills that passed one chamber or has money in it or have been recommended by a study commission. The short session follows the election primary so some members may be defeated and not returning in the following long session. In odd numbered years the long session begins in January.

4) Choose and invite a keynote speaker who matches your topic and will hopefully attract a large audience. In addition, having a consumer speak briefly about their experience pertaining to the issue can be a powerful opportunity for legislators and audience to understand the issue better from a consumer's point of view.

5) Choose and reserve the location and have one person serve as liaison for location details, such as gaining access or arranging a contract and ensuring deposits are delivered on time, etc. Decide if you want to videotape or tape record the guest speaker or other portions of event and follow through with setting this up.

6) Begin inviting legislators via phone and/or email. It may be helpful to include Legislative Assistants in these communications since many LA's are involved in arranging their Legislator's schedules.

7) Secure sponsorships such as, large individual donors, possibly attorneys who provide special needs trusts or who do disability related work. Figure out a budget and what sponsors pay what portion. Orange/Durham/Chatham county organizations divide all expenses equally among sponsors except for Club Nova and Threshold which are PSR Clubhouses and don't have to share the expenses.

- 8) Possibly invite additional co-sponsors as breakfast planning evolves and interest in event develops.
- 9) Confirm legislators' attendance and send them reminders before the Legislative Breakfast.
- 10) Confirm Keynote speaker
- 11) Decide on refreshments-catered or donated or prepared by volunteers.
- 12) Create publicity plan and time line.
- 13) Create printed materials: invitations, audience sign up sheet to get on sponsoring organizations email or postal mailing lists, advocacy/volunteer forms, feedback forms, agenda and program. Try to find a printer who might like to contribute by providing printed materials at a lower cost as a tax-deductible gift and for recognition in the program. Sample printed materials are available upon request from NAMIOClistserv@gmail.com
- 14) Choose moderator, possibly others to introduce speaker, candidates running for office or elected officials, other roles.
- 15) As event date gets closer, re-confirm/remind legislators, guest speakers, volunteers, etc.
- 16) Create schedule and assign volunteer roles/tasks for portions of program

An example of a possible schedule with a few tasks included is below:

### **SAMPLE "DAY OF EVENT" TIMELINE**

#### **7:00am Set up**

\*Sponsoring organizations and financial sponsor's tables are set up by their volunteers

#### Volunteer roles include:

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteers greet attendees as they enter and direct them to alphabetized, printed name tags if they've RSVP'd or to fill out name tags. If there is a charge for event, this is where money can be collected (remember to have plenty of change available).

\_\_\_\_\_ identify elected officials and candidates so moderator can recognize them at the beginning of program. It's helpful to have lists and pictures of elected officials sorted by county.

\_\_\_\_\_ Set up separate table for Legislators with name cards and water glasses/pitchers or arrange for them to sit with their constituents or event co-sponsors.

\_\_\_\_\_ check microphones and audio visual equipment-if battery mikes are used-try to have additional batteries available, set up at least 2 mikes with volunteers for audience questions, try to have 1 mic for every 2-3 legislators plus for moderator's podium.

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer photographer and/or videographer sets up to take pictures for use in newsletters, on websites, etc.

**7:30 Volunteer Meeting** Hold a quick volunteer meeting to review roles and call volunteers if they haven't shown up.

**8:00-9:30 Breakfast.**

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 Volunteers assist audience as needed to get seated by 9:30, handing them programs with note cards for written questions, feedback & advocacy/volunteer forms inserted into the program as they enter room. Volunteers remain at entrances to room to assist with seating latecomers.

**9:30 Moderator begins program**-welcomes audience and legislators, introduces elected officials and candidates, Moderator invites audience to sign up for sponsoring organizations email/postal mailing lists via sign up sheet in agenda, or on table or via clipboards being passed around and introduces keynote speaker. Program begins with the keynote speaker and is followed by written questions from the audience directed toward the legislators.

\_\_\_\_\_ Have 3 volunteers collect written questions from audience and 2 volunteers sort and evaluate questions to avoid repetition or off topic questions and give to moderator. Also have pre-written questions prepared by legislative breakfast committee to ensure important issues are addressed.

**At 11:00 give the legislators an opportunity to depart**, if they wish or have other events to attend.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2-3 volunteers run mikes for audience questions (use spare mikes from legislators table)

**Allow discussion with the audience to continue until 11:30.** This discussion could possibly involve the keynote speaker and/or other special guests answering questions and being involved with the discussion. Try to keep comments/questions no longer than 2-3 minutes for each person so all who wish to speak have an opportunity to be heard.

\_\_\_\_\_ Utilizing a timer and timekeeper with signs can be a helpful tool for the comment/discussion section.

\_\_\_\_\_ During this time Moderator invites audience to contribute financially to event and to fill out feedback forms and/or advocacy/volunteer forms. Also mentions organizations info tables in lobby for more info.

**11:30-12:00 Volunteers posted at each exit collect donations and forms as people leave.**  
Remember to request that checks be made out to the name of the "Payee Organization".

**12:00-12:30 Clean up, break down info tables, etc.**

Follow up a few weeks later with a meeting to review lessons learned, to share division of the final expenses incurred and to celebrate a job well done😊

**Previous Orange/Durham Legislative Breakfast themes/titles/speakers include:**

January, 1983 Presenters: Dr. Thad Monroe, psychiatrist, "Assuring Adequate Care" and Monroe and Lillian Woo, Exec. Dir. of MHA of NC, "Lack of coordination between state hospitals and community mental health programs"

1989 Presenters: Candidates for Governor, State Legislature and County Commission; topics: House Bill #968 No Death Penalty for MR or SPMI; House Bill #992, Mental Illness Definitions Clarified.

April, 1996 Presenter: Dr. John Baggett, Deputy Director, NC Division of Mental Health, DD, and SA; "Public Mental Health, What's Next?"

April, 1998: Presenter: Beth Melcher, Exec. Dir. of NCAMI, "The Challenge Ahead, Making a Real Difference.

April, 2000: Presenter: Dr. Beth Melcher, Director of Government Relations for the Alliance for the Mentally Ill, NC, "State Auditor's Report on Mental Health".

January, 2002: Presenters: Orange & Durham state legislators, "Concerning mental health needs in our community".

May, 2004 A forum for dialogue about mental health issues. Keynote speaker Lanier Cansler, Deputy Secretary, NC Dept of Health & Human Services, will address system reform issues, followed by a question and answer session with our state legislators.

March, 2005: Presenter: Dr. Michael Moseley, Director, NC Division of MH, DD, & SA, "Mental Health Reform: Unfinished Business".

Spring, 2006 "Insurance Parity for Mental Health Treatment" with Chris Fitzsimons, Director NC Policy Watch. Insurance Parity for Mental Health Treatment was presented as a civil rights issue.

January, 2007 "Transforming Mental Health Care: A Portrait of Reform" with Lee Smith, author.

May, 2008 "Defusing a Crisis: Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System" with Chief District Court Judge Joe Buckner.

February, 2009 "Health Care Reform and the Cost of Untreated Mental Illness" with Adam Searing, Project Director of the Health Access Coalition of NC Justice Center.

January, 2011 "Sustaining Hope for Mental Health Care in North Carolina" with Beth Melcher, PhD, NC Asst. Secretary for MH/DD/SA; Mebane Rash, NC Ctr. for Public Policy & Research; and Randi Davenport, author, "The Boy Who Loved Tornadoes."