



Alliance for the Advancement of  
**Infant Mental Health**

# Forming an Association for Infant Mental Health (AIMH)

## A Getting Started “Idea Booklet”

Ashley McCormick, LMSW, IECMH-E®  
Endorsement & Communications Director  
Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health

Angela Webster, MSW, IMH-E®  
Executive Director  
Association for Infant Mental Health in Tennessee

## WHAT IS AN ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH (AIMH)?

As an access point to the prenatal to 6 workforce, AIMHs are uniquely positioned to directly impact the composition of the field and play a vital role in strengthening service delivery systems. Effective AIMHs serve as a secure base where the workforce receives ongoing professional development, informed guidance on policy issues, and mentorship. When AIMHs are successful, their members thrive and better serve the specialized needs of babies, young children, and families. An AIMH is often one or more of the following:

- A nonprofit professional membership organization that's committed to promoting good infant and early childhood mental health
- An interdisciplinary organization whose members come from many sectors of the infant early childhood mental health (IECMH) workforce such as behavioral health, child welfare, early care and education, early intervention, health, home visiting, policy, research, etc.
- An organization that:
  - Prioritizes babies, young children, and relationships
  - Advocates for, educates, and supports the IECMH workforce
  - Recognizes competency through workforce development initiatives (ex: Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement<sup>®</sup>)

## WHAT MAKES AN AIMH DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TYPES OF YOUNG CHILD SERVING AGENCIES?

We have found that strong AIMHs have a clear identity. Members of the Alliance have described their organizational identity as one or more of the following:

- **Promoting early relational health:** promoting wellness (social-emotional development, learning) with a focus on babies, young children, and their families
- **Workforce development:** home for professionals, offer opportunities for community collaboration/connection. Provides support to strengthen the IECMH workforce through workforce development initiatives (ex: Endorsement<sup>®</sup>), professional development, reflective supervision/consultation, etc.
- **Public awareness:** advocacy and advancing the IECMH field through systems building, maintaining, and sustaining

For additional information on this topic, please refer to the paper, [“What Makes an Infant Mental Health Association Strong?”](#)

## HOW DOES A NEW STATE AIMH GET STARTED?

Forming an AIMH is a grassroots effort that requires some heavy lifting and committed resources. We know there are any number of ways AIMHs can come into being. There is no one path and no right or wrong direction. For this reason, we developed this guide as a framework for thinking through the process of formalizing the “idea” of a new AIMH.

Here are some things to think about:

- Coalition Building: Who needs to be at the table?
- Leadership Structure: Who will lead and how? Committee vs. Founding Board vs. Advisory Group
- Structure the Work: Independent Nonprofit vs. Umbrella vs. Fiscal Sponsorship
- Funding Framework: How will the work be funded?
- Programmatic structure: What will the AIMH do? What work products will be created?

## **COALITION BUILDING**

An AIMH at its core is a coalition of like-minded professionals, coming together to provide parents/caregivers and people working with babies, young children, and their families the knowledge, skills, and practices that support healthy social and emotional development. The first step toward creating an AIMH is assembling a group to gauge interest, prioritize and plan the next steps

- Gather a group of people who have a shared interest in the well-being of babies, young children, families, and early relational health
  - This group can be informally put together and may be small or large
  - Some find it helpful to begin by inviting people from established infant/early childhood coalitions, an infant-toddler task force, or from a community of practice
- Plan a gathering
  - Plan a special meeting or event to bring together those who are interested in IECMH and/or work with or on behalf of babies, young children, and families
    - You may want to invite a guest speaker to present on a hot topic with follow-up discussion, e.g. immigration, effects of opioid addiction on families, etc.
    - Another option is to provide a viewing of a current video about babies, young children, and families with follow-up discussion (e.g.: Michael Trout’s training series “The Awakening of Relationship”)
    - If there is a group already interested in moving forward, this meeting can be the launching pad for discussion, organizing, and moving forward
  - Allow time for networking and coming to know one another
  - Introduce the idea of working together to start an AIMH
    - Create an AIMH team
    - Assess interest in continuing to meet and propose meeting again
  - Collect Information
    - Invite those who attend the meeting/event to fill out a survey that captures their interest in establishing an AIMH. You may want to survey them about the following:

- What do you see as the benefit(s) of having an AIMH? (Examples of benefits)
  - Discount at annual/biennial conference
  - Educational/professional development offerings
  - Belonging to a group of IECMH professionals
  - Communication from AIMH
  - Advocacy opportunities
  - Exclusive access to webinars and/or learning opportunities
  - Inclusion on a list/registry of reflective supervision providers
  - Inclusion on a list/registry of trainers
  - Receiving exclusive journal and/or newsletter
  - Access to regional chapters, etc.
- What types of programs and opportunities do you hope the AIMH will provide?
  - Professional Development/Training
  - Technical Assistance
  - Networking
  - Reflective supervision/consultation
  - Marketing
  - Fundraising
  - Membership
- What sector of the workforce do you represent?
  - Home visiting (PAT, NFP, HFA, etc.)
  - Part C/early intervention
  - Early care
  - Early education
  - Medical/health care
  - Public health
  - Community mental health/behavioral health
  - Higher education
  - Advocacy
  - Policymaker
  - Creative arts/expressive arts therapy
  - Law/courts
  - Administration/supervision
  - Medicaid/insurance
  - Child welfare
  - Head Start/Early Head Start
  - Consultant – other

- Retired
- Student
- Other
- Who is missing?
  - Sector
  - Individual (Name/Title)
- In what ways do you increase IECMH awareness in your sector? (Examples of responses)
  - Participate in system of care planning initiatives
  - Participate in planning for regional and/or statewide IECMH-specific conferences
  - Publish (ZERO TO THREE, Infant Mental Health Journal, Child Development, etc.) on topics related to the promotion or practice of IECMH
  - Participate in regional, state, and/or national-level policy-making groups, representing IECMH principles
  - Publish Policy Briefs, White Papers, and/or Position Statements addressing IECMH
- JUMP!
  - Hold your breath and jump in!
  - Agree to establish a formal organization
  - Set a timeline for completion of tasks
  - Determine who will serve as leads for this phase (i.e. Chair or President, Treasurer, and Secretary and other officers, as needed, chair of the committee to work on bylaws, etc.)
  - Life Preservers: everyone needs a little help sometimes. Don't try to do it all by yourself and definitely don't try to reinvent the wheel
    - Utilize your networks and relationships to provide the foundation for your thinking, planning, and decision-making
    - Ask other US AIMHs for copies of their bylaws and other formative documents, such as articles of incorporation, relational MOUs, IRS form 1023, etc. for reference (contact the Alliance for help with this!)

## LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The structure of the leadership will be determined in part by the organization of the work. Will a nonprofit be created? Will the group umbrella under an existing organization? Will a fiscal agent be needed during the process?

- Identify who will lead. Are there those in the group who have the interest, skillset, and relationships to help get the AIMH started?

- Diversity considerations: regional, racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, discipline, and service sector diversity. Use a Board Composition Matrix to help guide this part of the process
- Consider the time and energy leadership has to invest in making this a successful venture. Creating an AIMH is time-consuming for those involved, particularly for the early leaders. The weight of the lift can be adjusted by creating reasonable timelines and consulting with content area experts. As with other projects, your leaders aren't expected to have all the expertise needed to make the decisions about the newly forming AIMH, they simply need to know when to ask questions and how and when to access expert input and support
- Determine how frequently the leadership group needs to meet as you get started; it may be necessary to meet frequently in the beginning and less often as the planning gets underway
  - Do you need to meet weekly or bi-weekly at the beginning? Monthly?
  - Set a time for the leaders to meet regularly
  - Provide regular updates to the broader group to keep all engaged in the process
- Those selected to lead will want to think about:
  - What can the AIMH provide that is not being provided by other organizations, e.g. networking, training, advocacy, reflective supervision?
  - Is there an organization that can provide "in-kind" support, e.g. an office, outreach, space for meetings, etc.?
  - Are there partners/collaborators/funders who might offer financial support?
  - Whether a consultant would be helpful in guiding the process and decision-making related to transitioning from a grassroots effort to a formalized agency

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK**

There are multiple paths to bring your AIMH to life. One of the decision points is how the work/organization will be structured. Is it best to create an independent nonprofit? Would it be prudent to partner with another organization and umbrella the work under that agency's tutelage? Is there a temporary option such as fiscal sponsorship? This list of considerations is not comprehensive. We suggest consulting with a nonprofit expert, attorney, or another consultant as you begin to make decisions around how to structure your AIMH.

- Independent nonprofit (i.e. IRS 501(c)(3))
  - This status is a permanent/long-term option. There are IRS laws and regulations that govern the formation and continued status of nonprofit organizations. Be aware, this option is a tax status, not a business model. This status comes with many advantages, such as the capacity to independently seek funding via grants, contracts, or fundraising. Challenges may include the need for significant operating capital early in the development of the new organization (i.e. if primary funding is expense reimbursed- must spend the funds before being reimbursed);

many philanthropic organizations require nonprofits to reach their third birthday before qualifying for funding support; new organizations often have gaps in policies, governance, and general oversight which can cause funding partners to shy away or withhold support until the organization “matures” and reaches more solid footing

- Umbrella organization
  - For the purposes of this guide, this short- or long-term option represents a formal agreement between an existing organization and a grassroots initiative. The established organization is often able to offer resources, financial security, and identity/credibility. Generally, umbrellaed groups share an aligned mission, target population, or program focus. There are legalities and considerations which must be explored before taking the final step toward this arrangement
  - Consider the following when partnering:
    - Are there existing organizations with strong IECMH programs that might take the new AIMH under their wing?
    - Is there a partner agency with an aligned mission that might consider helping to launch the AIMH as a program under their organization?
    - Does the established organization have the financial means, infrastructure, and capacity to take on the newly launching AIMH?
    - Explore a legally binding agreement that would be protective of both the umbrella organization and the new AIMH when considering this path
- Fiscal Sponsorship
  - This option is likely shorter-term and can address some of the inherent challenges of the early development of an AIMH. Trust between the two organizations is imperative
  - Under this arrangement, there is generally an agreed upon timeline wherein the developing organization will seek and obtain independent, nonprofit status. The Fiscal Sponsor will support the financial aspects of the newly created organization while they develop internal capacity to support their own financial needs and responsibilities
  - Develop a clearly delineated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the expectations of each, decision-making authority (i.e. who can enter into contracts on behalf of the new AIMH, can the AIMH apply for grants with or without approval from the staff, board, etc), and responsibilities of each party
  - Before entering into an MOU for fiscal sponsorship, explore whether the organization has the capacity to support your newly developing organization as well as whether the infrastructure (i.e. accounting systems, board structure and development, staffing composition, etc.) are sufficient

## **FUNDING FRAMEWORK**

How will the work be funded? Perhaps funding for infrastructure development has already been identified. If so, that is a most fortunate and unique space to be. Identifying startup funding can be the challenge that all else hinges upon. While locating funding to support the work can seem an insurmountable barrier, it's important to think through the early funding framework of the AIMH, including what your funding priorities are. What is it you are trying to accomplish with your early funding partners? Availability of funding can impact when and how things get started as well as how the AIMH is structured, at least initially. Thoughts to consider when determining your next funding step:

- Are there existing relationships within the IECMH community that might lead to funding support?
- Do local foundations and philanthropic organizations traditionally focus on infant-early childhood issues? Are there partners at the table with connections that might help?
- Do existing funding streams (MIECHV, Part C, Head Start, Child Care & Development Funds, etc.) allow space for new partnerships or infrastructure development?
- Does your team have ideas or plans for developing professional development offerings that might offer fee-based reimbursement?
- Are there team members with a knack for fundraising? Grant writing? Explore all your relationships, partnerships, and connections to see where the path might lead
- Listen to stories from other state AIMHs to help get your inspirational juices flowing

## **PROGRAMMATIC STRUCTURE**

- What will the AIMH do? What work products will be created?
  - To whom should your AIMH appeal?
  - What are the members' needs?
  - How can the AIMH most efficiently balance social and professional needs?
  - Keep the AIMH membership involved by inviting participation in committee assignments, e.g. Training Committee, Social Policy, Finance, Outreach/PR Committee, Endorsement Committee, etc.
  - Plan and coordinate high-quality competency-based learning opportunities, networking groups, communities of practice, etc.
  - Publish an attractive newsletter that highlights the activities of the members and that offers practical information about training
  - Work collaboratively with partners/collaborators to seek funding opportunities of mutual interest to workforce development promoting IECMH
  - Remember: Relationships are at the “heart of the organization”!

## **AIMH MEMBERSHIP**

Most AIMHs are membership organizations. If your goal is to bring Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement<sup>®</sup> to your state/region, a requirement of Endorsement<sup>®</sup> is that the



applicant has an active membership with the AIMH. This is because we believe that there is great benefit to having a professional home as one of our goals is to professionalize the IECMH field. There are other benefits of an AIMH having a membership component. The top 3 benefits of membership in an AIMH, as indicated by Alliance member AIMHs, are:

- Discounted professional development opportunities (including an annual or biennial Conference)
- Access to the Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement®
- Exclusive access to webinars, learning collaboratives, and other resources

Dues:

- Each AIMH has unique programmatic needs. Before a dues structure is determined, the basic objectives of the AIMH should be considered
- The dues should go toward supporting membership components like marketing, messaging, and outreach
- Establish a fixed date for collection of dues
  - Alliance member AIMHs have membership dues that range from \$20 – 80/year for an individual with many AIMHs having membership options for students, retirees, and organizations at varying price points
  - Alliance member AIMHs have an average membership fee of \$40.00/year
- Develop messaging about the benefits of membership
- Develop a plan for engaging professionals and retaining members

### **ADDITIONAL AIMH INFORMATION FROM ACROSS THE ALLIANCE**

The following is from 31 Alliance member AIMHs at the end of 2019:

- 82% of AIMHs are an independent 501(c)(3) organization
- AIMHs have Board of Directors' that range in size from 5 – 25 members
  - The average is 11 Board members
    - 45% of AIMHs had a Working Board, 36% had a Governing Board and 19% had an Advisory Board. It's important to note that many of the AIMHs indicated that they had two of three Boards at the same time (e.g.: Working Board and Advisory Board)
      - Working Board: Consist of members who do the work of the organization; including administration, fundraising, etc., in addition to doing the mission work
      - Governing Board: Consist of members who are responsible for governing the organization; including overseeing financial and staffing resources, etc. and ensuring that the mission work is being done
      - Advisory Board: Consist of members who give advice and support to the board of directors and/or staff

- 100% of AIMHs utilize committees and/or workgroups to help fulfill the mission of the organization
  - Common committees are: Professional Development/Training; Higher Education; Reflective Supervision/Consultation; Marketing; Fundraising; Membership; Finance; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; Social Action; Policy
- 61% of Alliance member AIMHs have paid staff
  - Common staff roles are: Executive Director; Endorsement Coordinator/Director; Professional Development Specialist/Director, Communications & Marketing Specialist/Director, Director of Development, Executive Assistant
  - 57% of AIMHs do not have a CEO/Executive Director while 76% of AIMHs do have an Endorsement Coordinator/Director
  - Staffing positions are funded in a variety of ways including: public funds/contracts, grants, products, philanthropic contributions, indirect on grants, revenue generated through training or other AIMH work, etc.
  - If your goal is to bring Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement<sup>®</sup> to your state/region, it is recommended that your AIMH hire an Endorsement Coordinator for at least .5 FTE

## **WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH (WAIMH)**

- Who is WAIMH?
  - WAIMH is an international nonprofit organization for scientific and educational professionals. WAIMH hosts a biennial congress that is devoted to scientific, educational, and clinical work with infants and their families
- What is the relationship between WAIMH and the Alliance?
  - The Alliance and WAIMH have a collegial and supportive relationship with one another. Both organizations are deeply committed to ensuring that all babies and young children begin their lives with healthy, sensitive, stable, and responsive caregiving relationships
- Why should a state AIMH become an affiliate?
  - WAIMH offers: networking, training, policy practice recommendations, continuing education, and enhancement of diversity within the IECMH field
  - It is the expectation of the Alliance that all our member AIMHs be (or work on becoming) affiliates of WAIMH
  - How does an AIMH become a WAIMH Affiliate?
    - Visit WAIMH's website: [Guidelines for Establishing an Affiliate](#)
- Last Step for WAIMH Affiliation
  - A copy of the new AIMH bylaws, a membership list including the names of the officers, the directors, and charter members, and application fees and dues should be sent to the Executive Director of WAIMH

- Applications for AIMH status are presented to the WAIMH Executive Committee upon recommendation of the President-Elect
- Upon receipt of written notification, your organization may include the following statement in all of its official publications and documents, "An Affiliate of the World Association for Infant Mental Health," and is required to display the WAIMH logo on official documents/website

This guide was greatly informed by:

Webster, A. (2021). *Raising a nonprofit in an early childhood world*. Manuscript in preparation.