

INTEREST NETWORK — CREATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

(Applications can be submitted from April 1 – 30, 2018)

The American Society for Association Executives (ASAE) describes special interest groups, also known as professional interest groups or networks, as groups involving members organized around specific interests and networking opportunities, providing collaboration with those sharing similar challenges and opportunities. As these groups mature, they can offer benefits such as subject-specific newsletters, access to specific library/resource information, discounts on educational opportunities that are within the interest network's scope, as well as leadership and volunteer opportunities. Across various associations, interest network topics vary but they result from shared interest among subject-matter areas.

Interest networks will position AAMFT to capitalize on membership skills, knowledge, and experience thereby advancing the practice and profession of couples, marriage, and family therapy. Interest networks can be created by any member provided they are able to demonstrate need, member interest, and alignment with the AAMFT strategic plan. The activities of the interest network should help AAMFT become more relevant to consumers, policy makers, agencies, and members.

Importantly, interest networks should reflect member needs. As Talisa Thomas-Hall with the National Association for College Admission Counseling noted to ASAE regarding their interest groups, "The groups that are doing really well are formed around topics that are very important to our members. When a new group forms, or an existing group dissolves, we get new insight into our members' needs."

Phase 1: Research and Planning

During this phase of the process, those interested in creating an interest network will need to establish a business brief that informs potential members of the mission, goals, and financial obligations of those wishing to join the interest network. The business brief should include the following information:

- Mission statement and narrative describing how the proposed interest network will support the AAMFT Strategic Plan.
- An annual balanced budget that indicates anticipated revenue streams, anticipated expenses, and clearly identifies cost of membership dues. All networks will be charged a 25% fee by AAMFT for membership processing, report generating and basic program management functions. This fee is waived for all networks launching in 2018 for one year.
- Intended engagement activities of the interest network such as online or in-person discussion groups, eNewsletter, networking or continuing education events or other activities to connect members and offer a quality experience to those who join.



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- A proposed three-year launch timeline with benchmark activities and metrics and intended processes. Timeline should include evaluation periods to determine how interest network is performing relative to the planned processes.
- Leadership structure and identification of who will fill those roles in the immediate and when new leadership will be introduced.

One of the primary functions of interest groups is leadership development. Each interest network will have a minimum of four officers that will preside and lead the group. Each interest network will determine whether more coordinators are needed, whether additional leadership is needed and any other governance structure is necessary for the development of the group. Interest networks should operate with a three-year leadership structure in mind. All interest networks will need to identify the following officers:

- Chair
- Chair-Elect
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Each officer will serve a three-year term except for the first group of officers who will have different terms to allow for eventual staggering of officers.

- Chair – three-year initial term
- Chair-Elect – two-year initial term, then 3 years (identified one year after formation)
- Secretary – one-year initial term, then move to three-year term
- Treasurer – two-year initial term, then move to three-year term

The inaugural leaders will be self-identified and serve one year. After completing the identified term, every interest network will need to have an election process to fairly identify new leaders. The leadership core will have a two successive term limit. Meaning, a Chair can become Secretary after fulfilling the three-year term. However, after fulfilling the term of Secretary, the leader will not be eligible for any position in core leadership. Therefore, the maximum time for serving in core leadership is six total years. After six years of not serving in a leadership position, a member would be eligible for another round of service in a leadership position.

Leadership is integral in the maintenance of interest networks and leadership development. A solid nominating process will be a significant variable of consideration regarding a geographic group's level of activity.

Phase 2: Application

Once the business brief and initial leadership structure has been identified, the interest network will submit all application materials to AAMFT. The Interest Network Committee will then evaluate and approve, not approve, or defer/make recommendations to the application.

Applications will be accepted April 1-30 of each year. This will allow for review of the application and provide the interest network up to six months of recruitment prior to the start of its engagement efforts.



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Phase 3: Recruitment

AAMFT will offer marketing support to all approved interest networks. The geographic network will have between now and April 30, 2018 to recruit and identify 25 AAMFT members wishing to participate. Upon filing for an interest network the network will have three months to collect all dues identified by those interested in participation. These dues will be collected by AAMFT and rebated back to the network.

Phase 4: Retention and Evaluation

All interest networks are based on demonstrating value to membership. Interest networks will need to complete an annual evaluation form reporting back on the efforts outlined in its business plan.

The minimal metrics that will be annually evaluated:

- Minimum participation of 25 members;
- Balanced budget is maintained;
- Leadership requirements are met;
- Member benefits are developed and delivered.

Dissolution of Interest Groups

Unless a completely egregious action is taken by an interest network (e.g. opposing AAMFT policies, Code of Ethics, etc.) dissolution of interest network will predominantly be contingent upon objective metrics.

1. Interest network fails to meet balanced budget two years, consecutively; OR
2. Interest network falls below the identified metric to form (25 members); OR
3. Interest network fails to file the necessary reports outlining activities and benchmarks; OR
4. Interest network fails to have elected leadership or leaders cannot be identified to manage the group and current leadership must perform beyond its two terms.

These conditions will be reported to the Network Committee. The specific interest network struggling to meet the minimum quality performance objectives are encouraged to consult with the Program Manager. Once a deficiency is identified, an interest network will have 12 months to improve performance. If it does not, then the group will be sunset.

AAMFT SUPPORT FOR INTEREST NETWORKS

AAMFT is dedicated to the success of the interest networks. To that end, AAMFT fully recognizes that the first three years of any interest network will require start-up support. AAMFT will be available to support and consult with forming interest networks:

- Feasibility study and consultation
- Marketing
- Governance
- Recruitment
- Staff
- Structure



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Feasibility study and consultation

AAMFT staff will work with members considering an interest group launch involving financial planning for growth and sustainability reaching “break even” levels, means of assessing interest and participation potentials. AAMFT will assist with other feasibility strategies such as surveys, membership projections, and strategic planning.

Marketing

AAMFT will assist interest networks with marketing efforts. Marketing can take the form of eNewsletters, Family Therapy Magazine (FTM) announcements, and other recruitment efforts. For example, AAMFT would have an annual interest group section within the FTM featuring all options for members.

Coordination

After launching, if an interest network wants to expand its leadership beyond the minimal four positions required for startup AAMFT is available for consultation to ensure that the structure is appropriate for the circumstances.

Recruitment

AAMFT staff will assist members with creating an interest network. Consultation services will be available to assist with the application, petition development, and budgeting for sustainability. Staff will be available for recruitment consultation. AAMFT will make available the necessary and appropriate resources for recruitment.

NETWORKS COMMITTEE

Geographic networks are not governance structures, but rather engagement programs that advance the practice and profession. Many will likely create sub-programs such as conferences and networking opportunities. All elements are within AAMFT and therefore fall under the scope of staff management. Their development, maturation, and evaluation will be overseen by the Networks Committee.

The Networks Committee will be comprised of seven members:

- AAMFT Chief Executive Officer
- AAMFT Director of Strategic Initiatives and Outreach
- Two AAMFT Board of Director Appointees by AAMFT President
- Three appointed members-at-large who are part of the network program (geographic or interest). To avoid conflicts of geographic, these members cannot be members of core leadership (Chair, Chair-Elect, Treasurer, and Secretary) within any of the geographic networks.

This cross-section of committee members will provide balance between leadership, staff, and network geographies.

- The scope of the Networks Committee includes:
- Review applications based on business brief submissions;
- Assess redundancy or uniqueness of network compared to existing networks;
- Ensure the goal and mission of the network is in line with the advancement of Strategic Plan;
- Evaluate whether the network embraces the values and principles identified in the Strategic Plan;
- Act as mediator if conflicts arise anywhere within the network program;
- Determine if and how an interest network must be sunset.

