

## Starting a Midwifery School

So you want to start a midwifery school! You recognize the worldwide need for more midwives and are committed to creating a unique legacy that will ensure that midwifery continues as a viable option for the future. We congratulate you on your decision and would like to assist you on this path with this guide to starting a midwifery school.

The first phase in starting a midwifery school involves **conceptualization**. Your new school will be structured around your experience and beliefs about how midwifery education should serve its students, faculty, the profession of midwifery and the families who receive the benefits of your students and their preceptors.

As you begin, ask yourself these questions:

1. **What is our vision of midwifery education?**
2. **Who are “we” and what do we bring to midwifery education?**

Having answered these two questions, you should now begin to write your mission statement. This vital step will guide you and keep you in integrity with your vision so that you don't lose your direction in the forest of details that will absorb your attention. Here is an excellent site that will assist you in building your all-important mission statement: <http://www.franklincovey.com/msb/>

Next, you will begin to create the **design** for your midwifery school. The answers to the following questions will guide program design. *Begin now to write the policies and procedures that will guide your analysis of these important matters and document your process every step of the way.* You are required to provide that level of organizational accountability as you seek state approval and national accreditation.

1. **What is our educational philosophy and model?** What do you believe midwifery education should “look like?” It is important to maintain the alignment between your educational model and the actual organizational structure of your school.
2. **What makes our concept unique?** Of course, every midwifery education program is unique because of the gifts that founders, faculty and administrators bring to the school. But it is important to have clarity with regard to what is special about your midwifery school, as this will help to guide you vision, planning, organizational structure and marketing.
3. **Who will write our curriculum? Do we need formal training in writing curricula?** Although there are Internet sites that provide examples of student learning objectives and learning outcomes, not all of this information is of the highest quality. If you have not had formal training in writing curricula, consider taking a formal class to assist you. Well-written curricula and syllabi support program, faculty and student accountability and promote a strong sense of confidence that the student learning objectives are being met. And should a substitute instructor become necessary for a period of time, a

seamless transition is possible because course objectives, textbooks and teaching methodology are clear.

4. **Who will teach the curriculum and what qualifications will they need to meet in order to belong to the faculty?** You may initially plan to limit your midwifery faculty to midwives. However, there are other talented individuals who are credentialed in other disciplines who can add depth to your academic faculty. Consider utilizing the talents of those who have teaching credentials in microbiology, chemistry, nursing, medicine, anthropology, law and business. You may be surprised at the support your school receives!
5. **Who will provide clinical instruction and what will their qualifications be?** Both the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council (MEAC) and the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) have specific guidelines for preceptors that should be factored into your decision-making process, even if you have no desire to pursue accreditation for your school.
6. **What will be the mode of delivery for our curriculum? Will we provide residential instruction or distance education? What challenges might be encountered by attempting to provide both?** Answering these questions is important to formulate the structure for your program. If you feel that the greatest strength of a midwifery education program would derive from close mentoring between faculty and students, it makes sense to organize small residential classes at your school that reflect this vision. What would be the advantages and disadvantages to allowing students to have a degree of freedom in choosing the order of the classes they take versus progressing through the midwifery program as a tight cohort? As you contemplate the answers to these questions, you will soon discern your preferences for mode of delivery and class structure.
7. **Will we establish our school as a proprietary (career) school, a non-profit charitable educational institution, or a private degree-granting program? On what factors are we basing our decision?** Before making a decision, we recommend that you interview knowledgeable midwifery educators and representatives from state agencies (such as your state's Board of Postsecondary Education) to ask their opinions about the pros and cons of each of these options. As you survey the types of accredited midwifery schools that are represented on the MEAC website, you will see that all types of schools are represented. The course you take will be determined by both your values and your market research.
8. **Will we pursue accreditation with the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council (MEAC)?** MEAC accreditation offers many benefits to midwifery schools, not the least of which is the fact that, when a midwifery school has completed the accreditation process, they have a turn-key operation that conforms to very high educational, business and accreditation standards. Midwifery students have come to accept MEAC accreditation as a standard for midwifery schools, and many states now look to NARM and MEAC as the

professional organizations that can be trusted to ensure competency for entry-level midwifery practice.

**Legal research** is the next step in your process. Prospective midwifery educators sometimes feel resistance to compulsory compliance with state laws regarding postsecondary education. Be assured, however, that compliance with state law is critical to your school's viability and is an essential first step to school accreditation. Virtually every state has stringent rules--and penalties--pertaining to higher education because they are mandated to protect students from diploma mills and accreditation mills. If you are out of compliance with your state's postsecondary educational agency, you risk losing your school, lack of credibility, financial penalties and severe legal repercussions. Research your state's laws for more information. Performing due diligence is critical. Here are some key issues you will need to address as you begin your legal research:

1. **Which agencies govern postsecondary education in our target state?** This will be the state's Board of Education, a Board of Postsecondary Education or similar agency. Contact them for information about establishing your school as an entity in the state. They will direct you to the laws that govern your school, depending on whether you are starting a degree-granting or a proprietary institution. *Enter and complete the approval process before the school becomes operational* or you will find yourself answering hard questions about why you are operating a school illegally. An illegal school opens itself to fines, prosecution, and shutdown. You also must be in full compliance with state laws governing postsecondary education before you can be allowed to seek MEAC accreditation. Be aware that states may require a distance education program that is actively soliciting students within that state to be established there as a legal entity or face penalties.
2. **What laws govern the practice of midwifery in the state in which we plan to establish our school?** If midwifery is illegal in your state, your students will be unable to legally learn and apply the skills necessary for safe midwifery practice.
3. **What laws pertain specifically to midwifery education in our target state?** Additional agencies such as the Medical Board may have oversight over midwifery programs in your target state. They will have rules and regulations that govern the provision of midwifery education.
4. **What laws regulate the type of school we wish to operate?** These differ depending on whether a school is not-for-profit, proprietary, or affiliated with a specific religious group. Distance education programs must comply with state laws pertaining to postsecondary education. Midwifery programs that are affiliated with community colleges or universities are subject to other laws and accreditation standards. There are additional laws that govern institutions seeking to provide Title IV financial aid, so you will want to determine whether or not your school wishes to participate.

**Market research** is an essential part of planning a midwifery school. The following questions must be addressed in order to establish your school successfully:

1. **Is there a need for another midwifery school? Why do we believe this to be so?** Examine both the idea of starting another midwifery school and your motivations for doing so.
2. **What type of midwifery education is currently available to our potential students?** Research may reveal that there is already a program in geographic proximity to yours. Is it a MEAC-accredited program? Many students may desire to enroll in your school if yours is seeking accreditation. Remember also that, while students in any locality have the option of obtaining their midwifery education via a distance education program, distance learning is not suitable for everyone. If you are planning to establish a distance learning midwifery school, how will your program serve its students and be unique in comparison to the others already in existence?
3. **What is the job outlook for midwives in the state in which we intend to establish our school?** Prospective students, state agencies and accrediting bodies will ask you the same question: how much money can midwives expect to earn once they graduate from a program? How do midwives establish job security in an uncertain financial market? You will need to back up your assertions with real data derived from the research you or others have done on the matter.
4. **What funding sources exist that can assist us in establishing a midwifery school?** Setting up a midwifery school requires start-up funding. While it is indeed possible to establish a midwifery school “on a shoestring,” eventually there will be needs for funding that are likely to require more income than that provided by student tuition.
5. **What is a realistic timeline for implementation of our plans?** Those with experience in establishing a midwifery school often advise others to build a considerable amount of extra time into the process. Other agencies have their own challenges with timelines. Their timing considerations will consistently impact yours, of necessity.

Now that you have considered all these issues and done the necessary research, you are ready to begin the **implementation phase**. Many of the following areas of implementation can be handled concurrently if you have resources available to do it.

1. **Educational and Administrative Issues:**

Before writing your curriculum you will want to devise its outline. Be sure that you are cognizant of the requirements you must fulfill. If there are state specifications for midwifery schools, obtain copies of those laws so that you can be in compliance with them.

An essential next step is to obtain copies of the NARM requirements for midwifery education programs and the MANA core competencies for entry-level midwifery practice. These are available as part of the MEAC Accreditation Handbook for Institutions, and are accessible via the MEAC website. Structuring your curriculum and learning objectives around the state, NARM and MEAC requirements may not make your process pain-free, but it will avoid having to do a lengthy re-write if these critical components are found to be out of alignment with the accepted standards for accreditation and approval of educational entities.

Academic and clinical faculty members are of equal importance in a midwifery school. Clinical instructors often do not understand this, as evidenced by the fact that many identify themselves professionally as “only a preceptor.” But each is critical to student success, for each offers a unique view to the practice of midwifery. MEAC requirements for academic and clinical faculty are very specific and are available via the Internet site noted previously. Part of your school’s responsibilities includes careful selection, credentialing, hiring, and training of your instructors. Contracts specifying amount and schedule for faculty remuneration are necessary for the protection of all parties.

By now you are probably wondering who will assist you with all this work! Initially the school’s directors may handle administrative tasks successfully but, as the school grows in size and scope, assistance will eventually become necessary. Your school’s administrative staff structure will be influenced primarily by four factors: the organizational structure of the school, the needs of the program, available personnel and the school’s financial resources. Administrative needs include but are not limited to admissions, student services, faculty supervision, learning resource and facilities oversight, records management, human resource services and regulatory compliance. MEAC’s Accreditation Handbook for Institutions can help you define and delineate these important administrative responsibilities.

## 2. **Legal Issues:**

As you begin the work of establishing your school, make sure that you do all that is required to identify the school as a legal entity. Simple tasks such as obtaining a business license, announcing the formation of the new school in area newspapers, submitting documents to state agencies, etc., are as necessary as they are time-consuming, for they help to protect your school and establish it as a credible institution. Consider utilizing the services of an attorney if your organizational structure requires more complex legal skills and management.

## 2. **Business, Fiscal and Operational Needs:**

In addition to being an educational institution, your midwifery school is a business. It must remain financially solvent—indeed, it should thrive—in

order to secure its viability and help ensure the future of midwifery. This level of thinking is critically important to your school's success and will bolster you in times when you feel resistant to finding operating space, writing a business plan, devising contracts, formulating policies and procedures, documenting meetings and establishing institutional accountability. You can and will find assistance with these tasks via MEAC, books, classes, the Internet, state agencies, hired consultants and knowledgeable friends within your community.

**“You Can Eat an Elephant . . . ”**

They say you can eat an elephant if you do it one bite at a time! The idea of starting a midwifery school can actually be daunting when you are faced with the clear reality of the time and energy required to do this excellently. But the world needs truly excellent midwifery education! Midwives are virtually the sole remaining voice for normal, physiologic pregnancy and birth in every country around the world. The birth-related problems we see in the United States are not confined to this nation; they are “viral” and they are everywhere. You are not alone in your desire to create a change. You have fellow midwives who will stand with you and can assist you to do whatever it takes to make your midwifery dreams come true. Join with the Association of Midwifery Educators and make that dream come true, for our children, and theirs. We are here to help. You can do it—it's just labor—and it is so, so very worth it as you see your school give birth to a robust midwifery future!