The Charter School Application Review Process
Key Considerations

Introduction:
Conducting a thorough evaluation of a charter school application is as much art as it is science. Charter schools are complex organizations that require strong educational, financial, legal, facilities, governance and management plans. The charter school application serves as the blueprint for the establishment and operation of a new, autonomous and accountable public school. It should clearly describe to the sponsor and the public the key design elements that will serve as the school’s foundation. It should demonstrate the applicant’s capacities to execute the plans described. The key design elements fall into three broad categories: Education, Organization, Finance and Facilities. However, simply providing the required information is not enough. In order to be approved, applications should meet standards of quality. Therefore, a quality application evaluation requires a team of individuals bringing the diverse expertise needed to evaluate all aspects of the application.

Missouri State Law:
Missouri State Law requires every sponsor to develop policies and procedures for the review of a charter school application that, “provides sufficient information for rigorous evaluation of the proposed charter and provides clear documentation that the education program and academic program are aligned with the state standards and grade-level expectations and provides clear documentation of effective governance and management structures, and a sustainable operational plan.”

The charter school application MUST include a legally binding performance contract that describes the obligations and responsibilities of the school and the sponsor as outlined in Statute including:

1. A mission and vision statement for the charter school;

2. A description of the charter school’s organizational structure and bylaws of the governing body, which will be responsible for the policy, financial management, and operational decisions of the charter school, including the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and operation of the charter school;

3. A financial plan for the first three years of operation of the charter school including provisions for annual audits;
4. A description of the charter school's policy for securing personnel services, its personnel policies, personnel qualifications, and professional development plan;

5. A description of the grades or ages of students being served;

6. The school's calendar of operation, which shall include at least the equivalent of a full school term as defined in section 160.011;

7. A description of the charter school's pupil performance standards and academic program performance standards, which shall meet the requirements of subdivision (6) of subsection 4 of this section. The charter school program shall be designed to enable each pupil to achieve such standards and shall contain a complete set of indicators, measures, metrics, and targets for academic program performance, including specific goals on graduation rates and standardized test performance and academic growth;

8. A description of the charter school's educational program and curriculum;

9. The term of the charter, which shall be five years and may be renewed;

10. Procedures, consistent with the Missouri financial accounting manual, for monitoring the financial accountability of the charter, which shall meet the requirements of subdivision (4) of subsection 4 of this section;

11. Preopening requirements for applications that require that charter schools meet all health, safety, and other legal requirements prior to opening;

12. A description of the charter school's policies on student discipline and student admission, which shall include a statement, where applicable, of the validity of attendance of students who do not reside in the district but who may be eligible to attend under the terms of judicial settlements and procedures that ensure admission of students with disabilities in a nondiscriminatory manner;

13. A description of the charter school's grievance procedure for parents or guardians;

14. A description of the agreement and time frame for implementation between the charter school and the sponsor as to when a sponsor shall intervene in a charter school, when a sponsor shall revoke a charter for failure to comply with subsection 8 of this section, and when a sponsor will not renew a charter under subsection 9 of this section;
15. Procedures to be implemented if the charter school should close, as provided in subdivision (6) of subsection 16 of section 160.400 including:
   (a) Orderly transition of student records to new schools and archival of student records;
   (b) Archival of business operation and transfer or repository of personnel records;
   (c) Submission of final financial reports;
   (d) Resolution of any remaining financial obligations;
   (e) Disposition of the charter school’s assets upon closure; and
   (f) A notification plan to inform parents or guardians of students, the local school district, the retirement system in which the charter school's employees participate, and the state board of education within thirty days of the decision to close;

16. A description of the special education and related services that shall be available to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Timeline for Charter Application Process – 2020 Opening
*Where an item requires a submission/resubmission it is considered as occurring on the 1st day of the month.

November 2017
- Review all documents in the New School Development Documents to Review File
- Review The Missouri Charter School History
- Review The Missouri Charter School Commission and the Role of Sponsorship
- Engage with the Community
  - Identify community members (including planning group members, community leaders, and parents/families) who are interested in education in the community
  - Solicit input from community members
  - Hold community meetings
  - Work with community members to collaboratively develop vision for the school
- Form a core design team
  - Assess skills, access experts
  - Ensure that design team is diverse in skill and experience
- Articulate initial vision for the charter school
- Apply for nonprofit and tax-exempt status (501c3 Entity)
- Develop clear vision and mission statements
- Create a plan that maps out how the design team will prepare the major design areas of the application
- Conduct research and reach out to experts in each major school design area, as needed, including:
- Educational program design
- School culture and climate
- Governance
- Budget/Finances
- Facilities
- Other

- Create a basic written description of your ideas for a new charter school, including major design areas
  - Share this prospectus with community members, school board leaders, potential funders, and others to engage them and solicit further input for your school design
- Develop a strategy for ideally gaining district support

January 2018
- Engage with the Community
- Begin drafting the charter application in preparation for submission to potential sponsor. The Missouri Model document can be accessed via the following link: http://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/charter-schools/sponsor-resources
  - THE FOLLOWING SHOULD ALWAYS BE NOTED AS IMPORTANT
    - Incorporate all elements required by law
    - Address any application requirements noted in the model application evaluation criteria
    - Provide detailed information on each major design area for your school
    - Review, Review, Review (CHECK ALL GRAMMAR!!)

March 2018
- Engage with the Community
- Identify possible facilities for the school
- Identify and apply for available local and national charter school start-up funding; begin to raise additional funds if needed*
  *In the State of Missouri, the availability of MO DESE CSP Grant is in question and currently no funds are available.

July 2018
- Engage with the Community
- Submit draft application for external evaluation (MCPSA can assist with coordinating the evaluation).
August 2018
- Engage with the Community
- Prepare revisions to application based on external evaluation

September 2018 - January 2019
- Engage with the Community
- Continue work on application
- Continue work on facility acquisition
- Continue work on fundraising

February 2019
- Submit entire application for external evaluation (MCPSA can assist with coordinating the evaluation).
  - Section A – Education Plan
  - Section B – Organizational Plan
  - Section C – Business Plan

From Now Moving Forward -
- Increase meetings with local leaders to discuss your charter application
  - Understand and address individual concerns
  - Show respect for opposition
  - Assess likelihood of approval
- Disseminate information about charter proposal
  - Meet with local media
  - Meet with church and community groups
  - Letters to the Editor
- Continue building and demonstrating community support
  - Attendance at school board meetings
  - Phone calls and letters to school board
  - Letters to the Editor

May 2019
- Submit charter application to potential sponsor (sponsor legally has 90 days to evaluate the application and consider sponsorship)
- Continue recruiting board members as needed
- Work with sponsor to revise charter application
August 2019

- Sponsor submission of charter application to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE legally has 60 days to evaluate the application for compliance prior to making a recommendation to the State Board for approval). **It should always be expected that MODESE does utilize their full 60 days.**
- Revise charter application as requested by DESE*
  *MO DESE holds the legal authority to require application modifications only if related to the charter school’s compliance with state and/or federal law. All other feedback from MO DESE are suggestions but not required.
- Begin head of school/principal/executive director search

October 2019

- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Recommendation to Missouri State Board of Education* for consideration during their November/December Meeting.

If final MOSBOE Approval Received - Preopening work begins toward a fall 2020 opening including:

- Finalize charter agreement with the sponsor
- Recruit and hire staff
- Recruit any necessary additional board members
- Recruit and admit students
- Orient staff and bring them into the planning process
- Provide board governance training
- Formalize the instructional process
  - Refine detailed curriculum instruction, and assessment plans
  - Finalize choice of and purchase instructional materials
  - Finalize detailed school calendar and daily schedule
  - Create detailed professional development schedule based on overall plans
- Arrange for facility and support services including (note that these services should be priced and budgeted earlier in the process; this step involves actually contracting for them)
  - Fiscal support (accounting, budget, payroll, banking, auditing, purchasing)
  - Transportation (if providing)
  - Food service
  - Insurance
  - Staff benefits
  - Telecommunications and technology
  - Other
• Confirm relationships with community groups, supporters, the sponsor, the media, MCPSA, and other partners

*The State Board holds one meeting between November and December each year. As the charter must be approved by January 30th it is best to consider the November/December meeting as the target meeting allowing the January State Board Meeting as a final option if needed.
Charter School Application Evaluation Process:
The Missouri Charter Public School Commission’s Application Evaluation Rubric guides you through an assessment of the key elements needed to design, manage, and operate a quality charter school consistent with Missouri law. Each section restates the application request and provides criteria for evaluating the applicant’s response to the request.

For each section, you are asked to determine whether the response meets, partially meets or does not meet the standard. In general, the following definitions should guide your assessment:

Within each section, your rating and accompanying comments for the section should apply and reference those criteria. Your comments and evidence are at least as significant as your rating.

When reviewing you are assessing whether the response demonstrates a thorough understanding of key issues and demonstrates capacity to open and operate a quality charter school. It addresses the topic with specific evidence that shows thorough preparation and presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate.

1. Read the entire section
2. Reread the section then note on the rubric whether the section:
   a. MEETS THE STANDARD - The response meets some of the criteria but lacks meaningful detail or requires additional information in one or more key areas.
   b. PARTIALLY MEETS THE STANDARD - The response lacks meaningful detail; demonstrates lack of preparation; and/or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of and ability to implement an effective plan including if the respondent does not respond to the required section.
   c. DOES NOT MEET THE STANDARD
3. Include what you identify as,
   a. STRENGTHS - Notable positive aspects of the response.
   b. WEAKNESSES – Information not provided, areas needing clarity, etc.
   c. QUESTIONS – Need for additional information and answers necessary for the application to be approved.

NOTE: For all STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND QUESTIONS it is important to note the relevant section and/or page number of the application for easy reference.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE AN EXPERT IN EVERY AREA OF THE APPLICATION. READ AND REVIEW ALL SECTIONS BUT IN THOSE AREAS WHERE YOU HAVE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE INCLUDE A MORE DETAILED, GRANULAR RESPONSE.