

Charter School Development and Application Roadmap

Step 1: Exploration (3-6 months)

- Investigate Mississippi's charter law, charter policies, and available funding and resources.
- Review Mississippi's charter school authorizing process.
 - *Ensure you understand the annual application process and updated timeline for the following:*
 - Letter of Intent
 - Eligibility Determination
 - Application Submission
 - Completeness Check
 - Completeness Remedy/Resubmission
 - Threshold Quality Review
 - Independent Evaluation Team Review
 - Public Hearings/Public Comment
 - Capacity Interview
 - Final Recommendations
 - Applicant Response
 - Final Approval
 - *Ensure you understand the review process, including:*
 - What is needed to move successfully through each step.
 - When responses or revisions will be possible.
 - What templates are provided and where they are located on the MCSAB website.
- Conduct research on charter schools, school models, and school design.
 - *Gain an understanding of what a charter school is and is not.*
 - *Explore different school models and designs to help you focus on what model and design you would like to employ.*
- Identify an eligible district and assess community and student needs.

- *Find out what grade the district received last year.*
- *Research school-level performance.*
- *Start to conceptualize how to best meet student needs in the community.*
- *Learn if the community will be receptive of a charter school.*
- *Gauge the community's knowledge of charter schools.*
- Research district performance and steps taken to improve student achievement.
- Visit charter schools in Mississippi and/or other states.
- Review successful charter applications from previous application cycles.

Step 2: Initial Design (3-6 months)

- Form a core school design team.
 - Look for a variety of expertise, such as:
 - Governance (Lawyer, Non-Profit Board Member, etc.)
 - Academics, including SPED (Teacher, Former School Leader, Professor, etc.)
 - Finance (Banker, CPA, Financial Advisor, Business Owner, etc.)
 - Marketing and Community Relations (Community Leader, Public Relations, etc.)
 - Real Estate (Realtor, Contractor, etc.)
- Articulate an initial vision for the charter school.
 - *Think about what your school will look like on the first day as well as five years into operating.*
 - *Consider the vision from the point of view of all stakeholders: teachers, parents, students, and community members.*
- Engage the community.
 - *Identify community members to engage, including*
 - Parents and families
 - City leaders
 - Business leaders
 - Church leaders
 - *Hold community interest meetings.*

- Relay your mission and vision to all stakeholders.
- Create buy-in for your school as a community-builder, not a divider.
- *Create and share a student needs assessment with prospective families.*
 - Survey families with school age children to gauge interest in a charter school and identify where gaps are in the student experience in area schools.
- Develop clear vision and mission statements.
 - *Write statements that provide a foundation for your school and reflect exactly what you want the school to be.*
- Create a plan that maps out how the design team will prepare the major design areas of the application and the school.
 - *Make sure the design team understands the time commitment necessary to write a successful application.*
 - *Conduct research and reach out to experts in the following areas as needed:*
 - Program Design (Curriculum, Special Education, Assessments, etc.)
 - Governance
 - Budget/Finance
 - Facilities
- Write a basic description or blueprint of your ideas for a new charter school.
 - Include major design areas.
 - Share this blueprint with community members, potential funders, and advocates.
- Identify possible facilities for the school.
 - *Look at buildings that will meet your needs in Year 1 that the school can also grow into.*
 - *Calculate any renovation/redesign costs, such as:*
 - Restroom requirements
 - Classroom size
 - Office space
 - Gym
 - Cafeteria

- Exits needed
- *Consider the cost of utilities for each property.*
- *Consider traffic flow for pick-up and drop-off.*
- *Consider outdoor space for a playground/play area.*
- Identify dates to apply for charter school start-up funding and other grants and begin to raise additional funds if needed.
- File Articles of Incorporation and apply for 501(c)3 non-profit status.

Step 3: Major Design (6-12 months)

- Write the educational program.
 - *Define your educational approach and goals.*
 - *Consider whether you will contract with a non-profit charter management organization.*
 - *Define the school's academic standards.*
 - *Develop or select a curriculum and instructional methods.*
 - *Develop or identify assessment methods.*
 - *Develop a special education plan.*
 - *Develop a professional development plan.*
 - *Develop an instructional calendar and daily schedule.*
- Devise a school culture and climate strategy.
 - *Articulate your vision for the school culture and climate and a strategy for developing and sustaining this for students and teachers.*
 - *Consider how this will inform the school leader.*
- Create a parent and community engagement strategy.
 - *Consider ways to engage the community further and gain sustained support.*
 - *Create a plan for student recruitment that is ready to deploy upon application approval.*
- Create a school governance structure.
 - Identify and recruit board members who bring a variety of expertise, skills, and relationships, such as:
 - Academics

- Business
- Finance
- Legal
- Law Enforcement
- Marketing
- Community Relations
- *Draft board by-laws and policies.*
- *Create an administrative structure.*
- *Identify school leaders and/or a recruitment strategy.*
- Identify school staffing needs.
 - *Develop a recruitment plan.*
 - *Converse with local colleges and universities.*
- Create a school budget and identify financial needs.
 - *Create a budget with the CSP grant and without it.*
 - *Secure and document funding sources/potential funding sources that will fill the gap without the CSP grant.*
- Devise facilities and operations plans.
 - *Identify or tentatively secure school facilities.*
- Write a school accountability plan.
 - *Incorporate accountability for*
 - Academic achievement
 - Sound fiscal management
 - School governance
- Address other application requirements, including plans for liability and insurance coverage, transportation, etc.

Step 4: Applying for the Charter

- Draft the charter application.
 - *Incorporate all elements required by law.*
 - *Address all application requirements.*
 - *Provide detailed information in each major design area.*

- *Look to the experts on your team to draft and review sections requiring special knowledge and research.*
- Ensure all questions are addressed fully.
- Review, review and then review again.
 - *Allow enough time (1-2 weeks) to review the full, final application draft in detail, including attachments.*
 - *Ensure that the application is comprehensive, addresses all required areas, adequately addresses any community concerns, and provides a solid framework for a high quality charter school.*
 - *Make sure that the narrative tells the complete and detailed story of the school.*
 - *Make sure that your budget is complete.*
 - *Make sure that your budget aligns with your narrative.*
 - *Make sure that your staffing plan aligns with your narrative.*
 - *Have each person on the team review the entire application, not just the section they drafted.*
- Submit the completed charter school proposal to the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board.

Resources:

- [The Mississippi Charter Schools Act](#)
- [Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board](#)