



## Office of Charter School Operations Charter School Application Process

### **Vision**

*Optimal education for all.*

### **Mission**

*Exemplify best practices through quality sponsorship of excellent schools.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The University of Missouri supports high quality schooling throughout the state of Missouri. Pursuant to our missions of teaching, research, service and economic development, our goals are driven by a sense of public service. The quality and effectiveness of excellent public schools is important, not only to Missouri's institutions of higher education, but to the economic engine of the state, and the overall quality of life for all citizens.

Providing an optimal education for all means that every person should have reasonable access to education that allows them to become the best person they can be, so that they can contribute to society in the best way possible. All people are valuable and all jobs are important. This office places no premium on any group of people or type of education over another. However, we recognize tremendous gaps in our education system. No one can say that every citizen has free access to a high-quality basic education and this office will do its part to strive towards universal access. However, our only control lies in our work as a charter school sponsor in Missouri.

The first Missouri charter school law was passed in 1998 with the intent of providing families with public school choice, and as a reform measure to encourage innovation. To that end, we are charged by Missouri Statute to hold our schools accountable for providing a free high-quality education to the students they serve. We take that responsibility seriously and will implement with fidelity and excellence in all we do. This starts with opening only schools that we believe have taken the time and made the investment to understand how to operate a high quality school and have a support network to allow implementation. Opening poor charter schools does more to harm the vision than opening none at all, and we strive to make no mistakes in this regard.

MU seeks high-quality applications from individuals and groups who have the skill, capacity and vision to initiate and sustain high quality public charter schools. Priority is given to applications that focus on alternative education, and educating high-risk students and the reentry of dropouts (Missouri Revised Statutes 160.405.2(5)). This application will take you through the process, but presumes you have already researched and investigated MO charter school law, operations and observed at least a few active schools. If you need more information on charter schools, in general, please visit our website at [musponsorship.missouri.edu](http://musponsorship.missouri.edu) for current links and other information.



## PROCESS IN BRIEF

**Prospectus**—may be submitted any time during the year. However, only those received by March 31 in any year will be considered for opening in the fall of the following year.

**Initial Review**—will take 14 days from date of receipt of the prospectus and any supporting documentation.

**Capacity Interviews**—will generally be completed within 60 days of receipt of a successful initial review.

**Invitation to Apply**—will be issued after successful completion of capacity interviews.

**Charter School Application**—prefer submittal by July 31. However, this may be negotiated.

**Final acceptance**—will be communicated within 30 days of receipt of the final charter school application.

**DESE Submission and Approval**—will be completed in the summer in anticipation of a fall approval. The State Board of Education is the authorizer and can reject an application that does not meet legal standards.

## PROCESS IN DETAIL

The application process to become a new school in the MU network involves four steps on the part of the applicant: prospectus, board capacity interview, full application, and submittal to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

### Prospectus

All new school applicants begin the process by submitting a five page prospectus. This “executive summary” or “elevator speech” describing the proposed charter school must be received by March 31 of the year prior to the expected fall opening. The prospectus will be submitted electronically, via email to [musponsorship@missouri.edu](mailto:musponsorship@missouri.edu), as one PDF document, minimum 11-point font, with one inch margins on all sides, and no more condensed than standard single spacing. It is permissible to provide embedded links (not documents) to any research cited, charter management company information, existing schools that have been used as models, or any other background information, including a full application or other developed documents, such as bylaws, policies, or student handbooks, if complete.

A thorough prospectus will address the following, in a maximum of five (5) pages:

- school mission;
- target student population
- school philosophy, design, innovation or other defining characteristics (replicator schools should include links to websites and performance data and contact information for existing



- school(s).);
- a day in the life of the school for students, staff, parents, etc.;
- academic, operational, financial outcomes; and
- evidence for, or explanation of, how the school design can produce those outcomes.

In addition to the five page prospectus, provide:

- resumes, vitas, and/or any other relevant information regarding the school's founding board and any identified staff, and
- a cash flow statement for the period from application to opening.

The resumes, vitas, and cash flow statement do not need to follow the previous editorial requirements, but should be part of the single PDF.

Once received, the office will have fourteen (14) days to review the prospectus. At this stage, the submitted documents should demonstrate that the founding team has:

- A compelling reason to open a charter school—whether by doing something different, better, or for a different population—as schools of choice, the applicant should be able to show a need and demand for their proposed school, for the population they intend to serve, in the area they intend to offer it;
- A sound educational model—whether an established school model or a new innovation, the founders will have a strong research or experiential basis for a high expectation of a quality education for their expected population;
- Strong support—may be financial or in-kind, but starting a charter school is a resource intensive endeavor with a high possibility of failure, so a successful operator will have spent years developing the support network of families, agencies, teachers and other educational professionals, and funding to be successful; and
- Board capacity—with the diversity of skills and knowledge, experience, and ability to attract and identify strong school leadership and provide stability to nurture the organization.

### **Capacity Interviews**

A successful prospectus will result in moving to the second stage of review, a capacity interview. The review team may request additional information and take time to perform other due diligence prior to scheduling capacity interviews. However, it is expected that the interview or interviews will be set within 30 days of notification of a successful prospectus, and completed within 60 days. The review team may request to meet with the charter school board, any identified staff, and representatives from any significant external stakeholders, such as a charter management organization or foundation board. The MU team will expect to travel to meet each of these groups and will expect separate interviews. It is also possible that more information will be requested as a result of these interviews, but a decision to advance to full application will be provided within fourteen (14) days of the final capacity interview.



## **Charter School Application**

A March 31 prospectus deadline presumes that prior to submittal of the prospectus, the applicant understands the requirements of the full application, which can also be found on the website ([musponsorship.missouri.edu](http://musponsorship.missouri.edu)) so that once the capacity interviews are complete, the full application should be submitted by July 31 and final review of the completed application will take 30 days. Acceptance will result in additional work to ready the application for a fall submittal to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, for opening the following fall.

Later DESE submissions are possible, but for an opening in the fall of any year, applications must be submitted to DESE by January 31 of the year of opening. MU prefers earlier submission (especially for applicants that do not already control a facility) and approval, to ensure opening tasks can proceed with ample time to overcome inevitable roadblocks. If a final application is rejected, the office will provide evaluation comments and recommendations for improvement. If no changes are made to the founding team, and a new application addresses all areas of weakness, the office will consider the application again, at any time, for an opening the following year. Significant changes will require a new prospectus.