

Education Reform Toolkits:
Resources to achieve results

Rubrics for Evaluating Charter Applications

How to Generate Tools for Evaluating Charter School Applications

developed by authorizers and districts
with support from



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For more information or district contacts, email: tools@broadfoundation.org.

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I. What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide is a resource for charter authorizers and school districts to develop effective evaluation tools or rubrics to assess charter school applications.

While this guide is most appropriate for charter authorizers, it may also be helpful for district administrators and staff reviewing proposals for new schools in general.

Evidence suggests that charter authorizers that create effective, standard written evaluation instruments tend to be more effective and consistent in their review of charter applications. Recognizing that the needs and approaches of each authorizer are unique, this guide provides details about how others have undertaken the process. Specifically, this guide includes:

- Basic steps for designing rubrics to evaluate charter applications
- Examples of best practices in creating rubrics
- Lessons learned by authorizers around the country

Context is important in the development of a rubric. Charter authorization is complex and multi-faceted, with elements that extend beyond the written evaluation instrument. The singular impact of a written evaluation instrument is limited unless it aligns and is combined with other elements of the broader authorizing process. The other steps of charter evaluations include:

1. Designing an effective application
2. Strategic selection of the group of individuals who will review the charter applications
3. Conducting face-to-face interviews
4. Compiling findings
5. Requesting revisions where relevant
6. Holding public hearings where applicable and
7. Making a fact-based decision on granting charters.

“Our rubric is one element of a multi-faceted process of charter school proposal evaluation,” explains Michael Duffy, executive director of charter schools in the New York City Department of Education. As such, a solid rubric will reap benefits only when it is paired with an effective overall process. Creating and maintaining a written instrument to evaluate charter applications is an iterative process that should evolve year to year.

II. Basic Steps to Creating a Written Evaluation Instrument

The steps involved in designing effective rubrics include:

- A. Ensuring the instrument is developed in alignment with the application
- B. Defining the criteria against which applications will be evaluated
- C. Establishing the method for scoring responses against established criteria and
- D. Continuously refining the rubric based on reviewer and high-quality charter school operator feedback

A – Align the evaluation rubric with the charter application

Aligning the evaluation rubric with the charter school application is key to ensuring that all stakeholders (applicants, reviewers and authorizer) are working toward the same standards of quality. As such, this guide assumes authorizers creating rubrics already have a high-quality application in place that outlines all essential elements required by state charter law.

Topics covered in the charter application should serve as the outline for the written evaluation instrument. The following excerpts demonstrate examples of alignment between the charter application and the corresponding written evaluation instrument. First, in Example 1 from the State University of New York’s Charter Schools Institute (SUNY Institute), the written evaluation form covers the same content, in the same order as the application. Question 15 of the application and question 15 of the evaluation cover the topic of instructional staff and student achievement goals.

Example 1 – Alignment of Application with Written Evaluation Form from the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute (SUNY)

APPLICATION excerpt

- 15. Provide a list of instructional staff for the school for each year of the charter that you are seeking. The list should indicate and identify classroom teachers, and any teaching aides or assistants, as well as any specialty teachers. In addition, the list should identify the number of instructional personnel in each classroom, e.g., one teacher, one teaching assistant, one paraprofessional for each class.**
- 16. Provide a description of the student achievement goals for the proposed school’s educational program.**

WRITTEN EVALUATION FORM excerpt

Request 15: Instructional Staff

The list of instructional staff should:

	Yes	No
reflect staffing for each year of the proposed charter term;		
indicate and identify classroom teachers and any teaching aides or assistants, as well as any specialist teachers; and,		
identify the number of instructional personnel in each classroom, e.g., one teacher, one teaching assistant, one paraprofessional for each class.		

To what extent does the instructional staff list fulfill the criteria listed above?

Not At All	Needs Significant Work	Needs Minor Work	Completely

Request 16: Student Achievement Goals

To what extent does the application meet the criterion of providing a description of the school’s proposed student achievement goals?

Not At All	Needs Significant Work	Needs Minor Work	Completely

Chicago Public Schools also aligns the content of their application, which is prepared as Request for Proposal (RFP), and their evaluation rubric, as demonstrated in Example 2, below. Note the similar content covered in questions 4a through 4d of their RFP and questions 4a through 4d of the evaluation rubric.

Example 2 – Alignment of RFP with Rubric from Chicago Public Schools

APPLICATION/RFP excerpt

4. Assessments and School-wide Data (3 pages)

- a. **Educational Goals and Metrics:** Identify educational goals and metrics for the proposed school. Create and include a table that details the school's *quantifiable* achievement goals, including targeted ISAT/PSAE scores, attendance levels, retention rates, and additional metrics for each of its first five years of operation. For high schools, include goals for graduation rates, college acceptance rates and college completion rates, as well as goals related to career readiness. (Refer to the Answer Manual for a sample table.) Discuss how these metrics will be used to monitor school-wide progress and impact corrective actions.
- b. **Student Assessment Plan:** Describe the assessment plan for the proposed school. Create and include a table that details specific formative and summative assessments (benchmark assessments, unit exams, state-required exams) that will be used for each grade level, the timing of their administration, and the rationale for their selection. Refer to the Answer Manual for a sample table.
- c. **Data-Driven Programs and Instruction:** Describe how school administrators and teachers will review results of formative and summative assessments to inform programmatic and instructional decisions and make adjustments to curricula, professional development, and other school components.
- d. **Operational Goals and Metrics:** Identify operational goals and metrics for the proposed school. Create and include a table that details the school's operational goals and metrics for each of its first five years of operation (e.g. teacher retention, financial solvency, funding partnerships, etc.). Discuss how these metrics will be used to monitor progress and impact corrective actions.

RUBRIC excerpt

RFP Question	Section	Category	Criteria
4a	Assessments and School Wide Data	Educational Goals and Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational goals and metrics are measurable, specific, and reflective of high expectations and demonstrate reasonable growth over the first five years • Educational goals and metrics reflect an understanding of the needs of entering students • Educational goals and metrics are aligned with core curricula, pedagogy, and instructional strategies
4b	Assessments and School Wide Data	Student assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School clearly demonstrates validity and reliability of chosen assessments • Assessments are appropriately aligned with curriculum, instruction, high academic standards and state mandated testing • Assessment plan reflects an effective frequency and content of interim and summative assessments • Assessments generate the required student, classroom and subject matter data needed to evaluate student, teacher and school progress and to shape and inform instruction on an ongoing basis
4c	Assessments and School Wide Data	Data-driven decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan demonstrates a link between assessment results and improved instruction at the student, classroom, grade, subject, school, and network levels • The assessment review and improvement planning process is timely and incorporates teachers and school leadership effectively • School calendar and daily schedule reflect adequate time for data review and improvement planning
4d	Assessments and School Wide Data	Operational goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational and financial goals are measurable, specific, and reflective of sound management controls and school level best practice • The plan describes how operational goals will be used to monitor progress and impact corrective actions

B – Define the criteria against which applications will be evaluated

Evaluation criteria should be clearly defined within the application. For example, the application for Denver Public Schools (DPS) requires a mission statement, and the evaluation instrument specifies the criteria against which the mission statement will be judged (see Example 3, below).

Example 3 – Mission statement evaluation criteria, Denver Public Schools

An excellent statement of the mission will include the following characteristics (Statutory Reference(s): CRS 22-30.5-106(1)(a):

- A succinct, clear, focused, and compelling guiding statement;
- A focus on improving educational outcomes; and
- A set of priorities that is meaningful, manageable, measurable, and consistent with the Denver Plan.

To develop evaluation criteria, begin by reviewing each element of the application (e.g., school governance, instructional plan, staffing plan; for a complete list of application elements, refer to

the links in Appendix E or Appendix G). For each element, determine the criteria against which the authorizer expects applications to be measured (e.g., for the education plan, you may care more about comprehensiveness, whereas for the operating plan you may pay more attention to detail). One approach is for authorizers to convene a team of charter school experts, including successful charter operators, to go through the application question by question to ensure that criteria are defined in alignment with the application.

Some authorizers communicate their evaluation criteria, or some portion of them, to charter developers by embedding the criteria within the application guidelines. Note that Section III of this guide, “Tips for Writing Effective Rubrics,” discusses pros and cons of such transparency, and provides examples of how to define optimal evaluation criteria.

C – Establish the method for scoring responses against evaluation criteria

The evaluation of a charter school application typically includes a combination of open-ended questions and measurable ratings-based approaches.

Rating systems

Ratings typically take the form of a scale that prompts reviewers to score each criterion—or set of criteria—according to pre-identified indicators for each level of quality. A rating scale can be either numerical (e.g., “1 to 4” scale) or description-based (e.g., “superior,” “good,” “fair” or “needs work”). While it is not recommended that authorizers use a rating scale exclusively, many authorizers find that prominent use of ratings provide them with a more calibrated and objective basis for review.

The New York City Department of Education’s (NYCDOE) evaluation rubric uses a ratings-based approach, with criteria clustered into topic areas in the first column (see Example 4, below), and a request for an “evaluation rating” for each set of criteria in the second green column. Note that NYCDOE also provides space for open-ended comments in the third column.

Example 4 – NYCDOE rubric with bulleted criteria and ratings

Application Section and Criteria	Evaluation Rating	Evidence to Substantiate Evaluation and Clarifying Questions
<p>VI. GOALS Mission Statement should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be ambitious, measurable and attainable. • reflect educational philosophy and goals of planning team. 		
<p>Goals should reflect the NYCDOE Performance Goals Template provided in the application (see Appendix A). In addition,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplemental educational and non-educational goals should be clear, rigorous and measurable • Varying types of assessment, including data-driven indicators, should be used to glean a comprehensive picture of school's progress 		
<p>VII. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM Well-developed proposals should reflect the following characteristics:</p> <p>Educational Design and Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-thought out educational program that will likely result in academic success for ALL students • Standards-based, academically rigorous curriculum • High academic expectations and strategies for the full range of students served by the school, including those at risk • Use of proven instructional models/methods • Engaging/authentic instructional strategies • Teachers empowered to determine and guide what and how students learn • Connections between classroom learning and the community 		

Evaluation Rating Key (for center column)

5 = EXEMPLARY: Essential school element(s) are extremely well planned and set example of very highest performing schools in our system.

4 = WELL DEVELOPED: Essential school element(s) are well-thought-out, clear, rigorous, appropriate and aligned with other key elements.

3 = PROFICIENT: "On the right track." Essential school element(s) are somewhat evident, but require further development and alignment.

2 = UNDERDEVELOPED WITH PROFICIENT FEATURES: Some evidence of proficiency, but not yet reflective of rich student learning.

1 = UNDERDEVELOPED: Essential school element(s) are significantly lacking, poorly thought-out, inappropriate, absent, and/or unaligned.

By using a deliberate ratings-based approach, authorizers ensure that their proposal evaluation is data-driven and less susceptible to interpretation.

Ratings-based quantitative approaches may also include a weighted formula to further differentiate along a scale from high- to low-caliber responses. The benefits of a quantitatively driven approach are clear, but authorizers must be cognizant that a total or average score should be viewed within the context of meaningful narrative or qualitative feedback.

Rating scales can be as simple as a straightforward binary “yes” or “no,” such as the following example used by SUNY’s Charter Schools Institute.

Example 5 – SUNY Rubric Excerpt regarding yes/no responses and a four-tiered rating system

Request 18: Use of Assessment Data		Yes	No
The application must include a plan for the use of assessment data, and that plan should:			
describe what assessments will be used and explain the purpose of each assessment, e.g. diagnostic, formative, or summative;			
indicate how assessments will align with state standards and be valid and reliable;			
describe how assessments will be used by school leaders to monitor and make improvements and changes to the school’s curriculum and instruction, e.g., changes to remediation, professional development, personnel, etc., and how it will be used by teachers to make changes and improvements to curriculum and instruction, e.g., re-teaching a key skill where data indicates that the skill was not learned the first time; and			
explain how assessment data will be used to determine accurately whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved.			
To what extent does the plan for the use of assessment data fulfill the criteria listed above?			
Not At All	Needs Significant Work	Needs Minor Work	Completely

Rating approaches can also take the form of a multi-point scale, offering reviewers numerous quality levels to select from when evaluating each discrete criterion. Four-point scales are the most common and effective multi-point scale for rubrics because they remove the middle catch-all value (e.g., a “3” on a five-point scale) and keep the number of rating levels concise.

Ratings can be applied with or without numbers. If numbers are assigned, it is widely accepted that the positive rating is assigned the high value (e.g., “4” on a four-point scale) and the negative rating is assigned the low value (e.g., “1” on a four-point scale).

Chicago Public Schools uses a four-point scale in the ratings-based portion of their evaluation tool, as depicted in Example 6, on the following page.

Example 6 – Four point rating scale used in the Chicago Public Schools rubric

				Not Applicable	Minimal	Limited	Adequate	Strong
RFP Question	Section	Category	Criteria	0	0	1	2	3
3b	School Culture and Climate	College Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model provides a rigorous curriculum to prepare students to be successful to and through college and incorporates opportunities for exposure to college culture <i>If High School:</i> Model provides supports necessary to prepare students for the college experience: expose to post secondary opportunities, track/manage progress against acceptance criteria, assist with the application/financial aid processes, etc. <i>If High School:</i> The organization has created a mechanism to track college acceptance rates and student success in college and adapts curriculum and programs to improve success rates 					
3c	School Culture and Climate	Social and Emotional Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school defines an approach, and the staff members responsible, to identify and support the social and emotional needs of all students on an ongoing basis The school offers additional services, programs, activities beyond academics to address students' social and emotional needs The support plan aligns with the expected needs of students The school has a clear plan to manage the effectiveness of the planned supports and to make adjustments as needed 					
3d	School Culture and Climate	Parent Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has a clear plan for providing parent access to their students' educational experience The school will engage parents on an ongoing basis through governance or advisory committees, as required by their governance model 					

Ratings		
Not Applicable	---	This question does not apply to a unique aspect of this model or the question was only required for a subset of applicants.
Minimal	0	Essential element(s) are significantly lacking, poorly thought-out, absent, or unaligned; and team does not illustrate capacity to close the gap before school opening.
Limited	1	Essential elements were addressed with a limited response, and team demonstrates capacity and relevant expertise to close identified gaps prior to school opening.
Adequate	2	Essential elements were addressed with an adequate response. Through minor modifications and adjustments, the team can meet all criteria.
Strong	3	Essential elements are well-thought-out, clear, rigorous, appropriate and aligned with other key elements.

Open-ended prompts

Open-ended prompts allow reviewers to provide narrative written feedback for each element, which prompts more thoughtful responses and comprehensive evaluations. Authorizers can then draw upon these insights when developing probing questions for interviews. Open-ended questions become especially useful for evaluating atypical or non-standard charter school proposals and/or when the ratings-based scale may not capture the true value of the school's design to its targeted student population.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), a subset of Missouri's State Board of Education, utilizes open-ended prompts in its written evaluation tool, as demonstrated in Example 7, on the following page.


Example 7 – Open-ended questions in DESE rubric

Evaluation Detail		Check one (required)
<h2>A.6 Special Student Populations</h2>		<input type="checkbox"/> MEETS THE STANDARD <input type="checkbox"/> PARTIALLY MEETS THE STANDARD <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET THE STANDARD
<p>STRENGTHS (500 char. max)</p>	<p>Reference</p>	
<p>CONCERNS AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (500 char. max)</p>	<p>Reference</p>	
<h3>For Evaluator’s Reference</h3>		
<p>Evaluation Criteria</p> <p>A response that meets the standard will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate understanding of and capacity to meet state and federal requirements regarding identification and education of the likely ELL population; • Demonstrate understanding of and capacity to meet state and federal requirements regarding the identification and education of students with disabilities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicate a commitment to serving the full range of needs of students with disabilities; and <p>Indicate a commitment to serving the full range of needs of special education students.</p>	
	<p>Applicant Instructions</p> <p>A.6 Special Student Populations</p> <p>Describe the school's plan for educating children with special needs, particularly those with limited English</p>	
<h3>Supplemental Write-in Fields</h3>		
<p>STRENGTHS</p> <p>Use the strengths box to identify notable positive aspects of the response.</p>		
<p>CONCERNS AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS</p> <p>Use the concerns and additional questions box to identify questions and concerns that bear on whether the application should be approved.</p>		
<p>REFERENCE</p> <p>Where applicable, use the “Reference” cell to note the relevant section and/or page number of the application.</p>		

The written evaluation instrument developed by Central Michigan University also contains open-ended questions, as shown in Example 8, below.

Example 8 – Open-ended questions in CMU rubric (Appendix A)

Application and Enrollment Plan:		
<i>The proposed application and enrollment plan:</i>	Yes	No
• describes how the general public will be provided notice that a charter school is being created.		
• describes the admission policy, criteria, and process.		
• includes a copy of the proposed application for enrollment.		
Strengths:		
Concerns and Questions:		



Analytic versus Holistic

The relevance of analytic and holistic approaches is useful to know when designing written evaluation instruments. Authorizers usually include a balance of analytic (detailed evaluations of each section of the proposal independently) and holistic (appraisal of proposals as a whole) approaches that best suit their unique and dynamic evaluation processes. Both analytic and holistic approaches are essential to a comprehensive review and must be factored into the creation of a effective evaluation rubric.

Analytic approaches measure each criterion independently, parsing out the standards and going deeper into each one. For example, an analytic approach would involve separately analyzing and evaluating the accountability plan and the parent engagement plan. The accountability plan could conceivably be poorly developed, for example, if it did not meet most criteria in the evaluation tool, while reviewers could potentially find the parent engagement plan to be well-developed. The results might then include a high rating for the parent engagement plan and a low rating for the accountability plan. A purely analytic approach would not attempt to synthesize these two pieces with other elements into an overall score. See the top half of Example 9, below, for illustration of an analytic approach.

Holistic approaches, on the other hand, look at the big picture. The holistic approach looks at the quality of the entire proposal, factoring in all elements combined to create an effective charter school. Holistic evaluations allow reviewers to rate a proposal on the merits of whether it would be an effective school overall. A holistic evaluation usually takes the form of a summary recommendation for approval or denial, placed at the beginning or end of the rubric.

Authorizers have found value in including both analytic and holistic elements: gathering feedback on discrete criteria but also obtaining insights on the caliber of the application as a whole. It is critical to evaluate specific technical elements, but authorizers must also recognize that the “whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” explains Carol Mehesy, associate at Denver Public Schools Office of Innovation and School Reform.

Example 9, on the following page, illustrates how NYCDOE utilizes both analytic and holistic approaches. The analytic section (top portion of the evaluation) parses out evaluation by topic areas, while the holistic section (bottom portion of the evaluation) prompts the reviewer to assess the application as a whole.

Example 9 – NYCDOE rubric with a combination of analytic and holistic approaches (Appendix D)

WRITTEN EVALUATION TOOL excerpt – Analytic Approach

Application Section and Criteria	Evaluation Rating	Evidence to Substantiate Evaluation and Clarifying Questions
<p>VI. GOALS Mission Statement should: • be ambitious, measurable and attainable. • reflect educational philosophy and goals of planning team.</p>		
<p>Goals should reflect the NYCDOE Performance Goals Template provided in the application (see Appendix A). In addition, • Supplemental educational and non-educational goals should be clear, rigorous and measurable • Varying types of assessment, including data-driven indicators, should be used to <u>gain a comprehensive picture of school's progress</u></p>		
<p>VII. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM Well-developed proposals should reflect the following characteristics: Educational Design and Curriculum • Well-thought out educational program that will likely result in academic success for ALL students • Standards-based, academically rigorous curriculum • High academic expectations and strategies for the full range of students served by the school, including those at risk • Use of proven instructional models/methods • Engaging/authentic instructional strategies • Teachers empowered to determine and guide what and how students learn • Connections between classroom learning and the community</p>		

WRITTEN EVALUATION INSTRUMENT excerpt – Holistic Approach

<p>Recommendation:</p>
<p>_____ Approve for Opening for September 2009 (or proposed launch date) Proposals recommended for approval for opening in September 2009 (or proposed launch date) should reflect most of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Essential school elements are clearly outlined and cohesively represent a effective and well-developed school proposal. ▪ Planning team/Board DOES NOT demonstrate: understanding of the scope, depth of development and critical choices that must occur before launch; capacity to execute on plan or sustain school over time. ▪ Partially- and under-developed areas can be remedied by team during planning months and by proposed launch date. (PLEASE specify these areas for development in rubric.) ▪ Application represents an effective, well-developed school proposal that will promote student learning and offer dynamic opportunities to families/students of NYC.
<p>_____ Not Yet Ready for Approval Proposals not yet ready for approval for September 2009 opening (or proposed launch date) may reflect the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proposal was lacking essential elements and the necessary cohesion among these key elements, thereby representing an incomplete and underdeveloped school plan. ▪ Planning team/Board DOES NOT demonstrate: understanding of the scope, depth of development and critical choices that must occur before launch; capacity to execute on plan or sustain school over time. ▪ Partially- and under-developed areas are too extensive and widespread to be remedied in planning months and by proposed school launch date. (PLEASE specify areas for development in rubric.) ▪ Application represents an incomplete and under-developed school proposal that would NOT offer an effective and valuable option for students by September 2009 (or proposed launch date).

D – Finalize evaluation rubric and draft the instructions

Finalize Evaluation Rubric

Selecting an appropriate layout for the review instrument is an important step in the process. Section IV of this guide includes examples of layouts used by other authorizers.

Rubrics are typically created in Microsoft Word or Excel. Word is optimal when rubrics have more open-ended questions. Excel is a better match for rubrics with a focus on ratings. Another factor to consider is reviewer familiarity with the format: some reviewers are not comfortable using Excel and are more comfortable with Word.

Draft the Instructions

Before distributing the evaluation instrument, authorizers should write a brief introduction to the rubric and instructions for completing it. Detailed instructions are especially important for first time and/or external reviewers. Reviewers are more likely to conduct thorough and meaningful evaluations when they understand how to use the instrument and how their feedback will be used.

Consider including the following in the instructions:

- Remind reviewers how the evaluation instrument fits into the overall process.
- Establish deadlines for submitting completed reviews.
- Explain how the authorizer will use the feedback.
- Clarify the purpose of the specific instrument used and the type of feedback that the authorizer hopes to derive from it.
- Specify the preferred format for feedback (e.g., handwritten or electronic).
- Reinforce the importance of reviewing for both the current quality of response as well as perceived capacity in the future (i.e., capacity of the initial planning team and perception of the charter governance board to adapt as challenges arise).
- Describe any other elements or instructions relevant to the authorizer-specific evaluation process.

It is ideal to pilot written evaluation instruments with small groups before going to scale. Since this is not always possible, yearly refinement becomes even more important.

In Example 10, below, Central Michigan University’s Center for Charter Schools rubric includes a thorough introduction and instructions (see Example 10, below).

Example 10 – Introduction and instructions from CMU rubric

Notes for Reviewers

Use this form to document your analysis of each charter applicant’s response to the Phase II Charter Application. Within each section, introductory paragraphs and bulleted items are provided to assist you in understanding the expectations communicated to the applicant through the Phase II Charter Application requests and accompanying guidance. **Please indicate whether the applicant has addressed each request in alignment with the guidance by checking “yes” or “no” for each bulleted item.**

Following each list of bulleted requests are boxes labeled “Strengths” and “Concerns and Questions.” **In the appropriate box, please comment on the overall quality of the applicant’s responses by identifying merits or weaknesses of the applicant’s proposal, based on your professional judgment and expertise. You are also encouraged to comment on the extent to which the plan, when implemented, will likely result in a charter school that will be highly effective at improving student learning and achievement.** The notes should be clear and specific enough to serve as a basis for discussion during the External Application Review Team Meeting, as well as to inform further review of the Phase II Charter Application by The Center for Charter Schools (“the Center”).

In addition, list questions arising upon review of the applicant’s response within the box labeled “Concerns and Questions.” These questions will assist the Center in identifying areas for further discussion and clarification during interviews with the applicant and/or application development team.

Please review all sections of the application in their entirety.

It should be noted that the External Review of each charter application is meant to inform the Phase II Charter Application review process, and not drive the outcome of the process. Therefore, a prevalence of items checked “yes” or “no,” or strengths, concerns, and questions identified by the external application reviewer(s) alone will neither result in the applicant moving forward or being removed from further consideration.

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E – Refine the rubric with reviewer feedback

Refining rubrics based on success or failure is pivotal to the ongoing improvement process for written evaluation instruments. Authorizers may request feedback from reviewers and charter operators regarding the effectiveness, comprehensiveness, and ease of use of the rubric, via online survey, in person, by email, or over the phone. Authorizers will likely want to seek

feedback about many aspects of the charter application review process, beyond just the rubric, such as:

- Overall experience of reviewers and charter developers/operators
- Clarity on the roles and responsibilities of reviewers
- Ease of access to materials by reviewers
- Effectiveness of the rubric
- Efficacy of the face-to-face interview
- Reviewer willingness to participate again
- Diversity of expertise of fellow reviewers

As the application is revised year to year, remember to make parallel changes to the evaluation instrument and vice versa. “Your process can’t be static,” explains Jennifer Sneed of SUNY’s Charter Schools Institute. “As you learn and grow, you want to make sure your instrument follows you.” Count on the fact that what is deemed “final” in one year will be refined for the next year, especially when an authorizer is new to the process.

III. Tips for Writing Effective Rubrics

Here are some additional tips to consider when developing charter evaluation rubrics.

Structure and organize the rubric in an intuitive way

Rubrics should be user-friendly—easy to read and navigate. They also should be appropriately formatted for publishing.

An organized structure makes it easier for authorizers to consolidate feedback and analyze findings. Brief and clear instructions are recommended to enhance the ease with which reviewers undertake their written evaluation.

The written evaluation instrument should be organized in parallel with the application. As reviewers read the first section of the applicant’s response, for example, they should be able to match input feedback into the corresponding first section of the evaluation tool, proceeding in similar fashion throughout the document as they complete their systematic review (see examples in Section II.A.).

Effective Example	Ineffective Example
<p><i>If the...</i> Charter application begins with the educational plan, then covers the operational plan and then governance...</p> <p><i>Then the...</i> Written evaluation instrument should begin with the educational plan, then cover the operational plan and then governance.</p>	<p><i>If the...</i> Charter application begins with the educational plan, then covers the operational plan and then governance...</p> <p><i>Then the...</i> Written evaluation instrument begins with governance questions, and then ask questions about the educational and operational plans, then returns to governance questions.</p>

Keep it concise

Don’t make the rubric longer than it needs to be. Avoid wordiness and jargon. Minimize paperwork. Just as authorizers work to reduce the administrative burden for charter operators, so too should they strive to minimize paperwork for reviewers. Certain indicators may require more comprehensive descriptions, but authorizers should err on the side of simplicity.

Effective Example	Ineffective Example
<p>Organizational chart is comprehensive, reflects lines of authority, and includes responsible spans of control within the school and between the school and the board.</p>	<p>Staffing structure and organizational chart both represent reasonable plans and expectations for reporting arrangements employee-to-employee and between employees and the board; all staff roles are covered and all relevant things were thought of. Lines of authority are drawn and reflect appropriate reporting relationships between the school leader, teachers, operations, and office staff.</p>

Be specific

In defining criteria, be as specific as possible. Avoid abstract words and give additional context for better calibration from one review to the next.

Effective Example	Ineffective Example
Job descriptions are clear and comprehensive and do not overlap.	Job descriptions were well-written.

Be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive

Evaluation instruments should be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, meaning that they should be all-encompassing, but avoid overlap from question to question.

A rubric should be sufficiently comprehensive to cover all critical criteria that the authorizer deems important in a high-quality charter school. To embody a mutually exclusive approach, each criterion, or related set of criteria, should be captured as a discrete element, thereby not overlapping or repeating concepts.

Note that parsing out different sections of an application to be evaluated by different reviewers is not a good idea. Components of applications are often interrelated, and such parsing will inevitably lead to poor results.

Be objective and fair

Rubrics should be a fair assessment of what is asked of applicants. For example, don't evaluate applicants on the absence of a facilities plan if the application never asked for one.

Different reviewers who read the same criterion should generally share the same understanding of the concept. Wording should not be open to interpretation and likewise not be easily subject to *misinterpretation* (piloting the evaluation instrument will help here). Language should be accurate, clear, unbiased and consistent.

Effective Example	Ineffective Example
Business plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes a three-year budget forecast• Demonstrates sound fiscal judgment• Provides detail relating to anticipated start-up costs• Demonstrates a commitment to the described educational program	Budget was better than most other proposals.

Be transparent and objective

While authorizers may not want to share every detail of their rubric with applicants, it is recommended that some level of transparency about the criteria used to rate quality be provided. An effective practice is to *minimally* communicate the general approach that will be taken during the review process and high-level criteria against which the authorizer plans to rate the proposal.

Some authorizers write the criteria for evaluation directly on their application, enabling developers to appropriately craft their submissions.

In 2009, the NYCDOE did not provide its complete rubric to applicants, but it did share the sub-components with applicants (e.g., the criteria against which applications were to be measured). For future application cycles, the district intends to share the entire rubric on their website. As illustrated in Example 11, below, callout boxes embedded within the NYCDOE application delineate the criteria against which applications will be scored.

Example 11 – Transparency of evaluation criteria in NYCDOE application and review process (Appendix D)

<u>APPLICATION</u> excerpt		
<p>XII. School Facilities [click here to return to Table of Contents]</p>		
<p><i>Reviewers will look for a school facilities plan that includes the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Well-developed facility plan for non-DOE space that presents a viable option for siting by the proposed school start date</i> • <i>Appropriate and realistic assumptions about the amount of space needed in the school's first year of operation and as it scales up</i> • <i>Appropriate and realistic assumptions about the cost of space in the proposed neighborhood / community</i> • <i>Acknowledgement of possible constraints in space availability and timing</i> • <i>Alignment of financial projections to facility plan, and a viable budget factoring in cost of private space</i> • <i>Demonstrated capacity to deliver on the financing proposal set forth</i> 		
<u>RUBRIC</u> excerpt		
Part 4: How Will Your School Comply with Applicable Laws and Regulations?		
Application Section and Criteria	Evaluation Rating	Evidence to Substantiate Evaluation
<p>XII. SCHOOL FACILITIES</p> <p>A well-developed facility plan for non-DOE space should be strong, and should present a viable option for siting by the proposed school start date. This should be reflected in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appropriate and realistic assumptions about the amount of space needed in the school's first year and as it scales up ▪ Appropriate and realistic assumptions about the cost of space in the proposed neighborhood / community ▪ Acknowledgement of possible constraints in space availability and timing ▪ Alignment of financial projections to facility plan. ▪ Demonstrated capacity to deliver on the financing proposal set forth 		

The Indianapolis mayor's office writes its evaluation criteria directly on the application to ensure that both applicants and reviewers clearly understand the criteria (see Example 12, below).

Example 12 – Evaluation criteria included on application by the Indianapolis mayor's office

APPLICATION excerpt

B. Need

Indiana law states that charter schools are to be established to provide innovative and autonomous programs that among other things serve different learning styles and needs of public school students and offer public school students appropriate innovative choices. Explain the need for this particular school in the community it will serve and the target student population. Strong answers to this question will address why your school is needed beyond simply an analysis of school district statistics and a general discussion of school choice.

If your school currently exists and is applying for a conversion to charter status, explain how the school will benefit from becoming a charter school and how the conversion will address the needs of the community. In addition, **you must** provide evidence of your current school's successes (academic, organizational, test scores, etc.).

Criteria:

Reviewers will look for:

- a compelling description of whom the charter school intends to reach and the target student population's unique need; and*
- a specific rationale for how this school will enhance or expand the educational options currently available to the target student population.*

IV. Conclusion

Charter school authorizers play a critical role in the education landscape by fostering innovation and ensuring quality control. By bringing together resources and examples from a number of successful charter authorizers, it is our hope that this document will help others as they design transparent, collaborative and effective tools for the review of charter school applications.

V. Appendix – Applications and Rubrics from a Sampling of Authorizers

In developing their written evaluation tools, authorizers may find it beneficial to view examples of applications and rubrics from other high-quality authorizers. Listed below are short descriptions for several authorizers that have developed strong evaluation processes. Corresponding full-text rubrics are available for Appendices A-E in attached documents entitled Attachments A-E. Note that Appendix F does not have a full rubric associated with it and the full rubric for Appendix G is linked in the text rather than being attached.

Central Michigan University – Appendix A

Central Michigan University's Center for Charter Schools (CMU) recently modified its charter application process to include an external review component, and in parallel reshaped its written evaluation instrument. CMU's rubric contains many open-ended questions and also includes rating scales. The center's application is available online at: http://cmucso.org/modules.php?name=Pages&sp_id=182&pmenu_id=258. The rubric is aligned with the "Phase 2" application on the website link above.

Chicago Public Schools – Appendix B

The Office of New Schools within Chicago Public Schools (CPS) manages the request for proposals (RFP) process for new school creation, including for charter, performance and contract schools. CPS recently redesigned its rubric to be more structured and ratings-based, building in more detailed criteria and a four-point rating scale. CPS uses three different RFPs (first-time proposals, returning/invited applicants and CMOs), and therefore has three rubrics to align with differing criteria of each. CPS' rubric for first-time proposals is available in Appendix B. To see how the RFP aligns with the rubric, visit the CPS website at: http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/docs/RFP_Open_Questions.pdf

Denver Public Schools – Appendix C

The rubric used by Denver Public Schools (DPS) for charter school authorization can be found in Appendix C. DPS' application materials (an RFP and Charter Applicant Questions) are online at: http://osri.dpsk12.org/school_creation

New York City Department of Education – Appendix D

The New York City Department of Education's Office of Charter Schools uses a rubric to guide written evaluation of its charter applications by reviewers. The Excel-based rubric contains both ratings-based quality scales and open-ended areas for comments and questions. Like other authorizers, NYCDOE uses its rubric as one of many touch points to evaluate caliber of applicants. To see how the rubric aligns with the application, visit: <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/charters/CharterSchoolCreation>

SUNY Charter Schools Institute – Appendix E

The State University of New York’s Charter Schools Institute (SUNY) has refined its application review form over many years, and institute staff continually adapt and improve it. SUNY utilizes a combination of open-ended questions and ratings-based scales in its written tool. Years ago, SUNY used an evaluation form with all open-ended questions, but as they became a more experienced authorizer and established more concrete expectations of applicants, staff found the need to be more specific. SUNY previously used different evaluation forms for internal and external reviewers, but now uses a single form for all reviewers. The SUNY written evaluation form in Appendix E is aligned with the institute’s 6th Edition Application Kit (online at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/openAppKit.htm>). In 2009/2010, SUNY will introduce a 7th Edition Application Kit and amend its written evaluation form accordingly.

Indianapolis Mayor’s Office – Appendix F

The Indianapolis mayor’s office does not utilize a pre-designed written evaluation instrument. Its guidelines for rating applications are written directly on their application form in grey boxes that are clearly labeled “criteria for evaluation.” External reviewers are asked to evaluate proposals against these criteria and submit feedback in the form of a memo. In addition to internal staff and external reviewers’ analysis of applications, a number of public meetings are held to evaluate applications. The application can be accessed online at: <http://www.indy.gov/eGov/Mayor/Education/Charter/Schools/Starting/Documents/Application%20Packet%202009.pdf>

Missouri State Board of Education – Appendix G

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), a subset of Missouri’s State Board of Education, recently developed “model” tools and templates that charter sponsors across Missouri can utilize when conducting their review processes. DESE’s tools and templates, including its application evaluation rubric, were developed in collaboration with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). DESE’s full tools and templates are online at: <http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/charterschools/sponsorresources.htm>
DESE’s application evaluation rubric can be accessed directly at: <http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/charterschools/documents/evaluationrubric.pdf>