



PHASE II: NEW CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION GUIDE

Office of Educational Opportunity

Van Hise Hall, 1220 Linden Drive

Madison, WI 53706

608-262-8887 | www.wisconsin.edu/oeo

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Introduction

Background

The Office of Educational Opportunity (OEO) was created through the Wisconsin Legislature in 2015 as part of the biennial budget Act 55 and amended in 2017 to allow for statewide authorization of charter schools. The Office of Educational Opportunity serves as the review and monitoring office as defined by legislation.

As part of the Universities of Wisconsin, the Office of Educational Opportunity (OEO) interprets its legislative responsibilities to authorize charter schools that have a potential to improve the educational outcomes for students, especially students who do not have access to high quality community desired educational programs. Charter schools must have programs that provide quality education to all students and address the critical issues in education our state and local communities face.

The OEO seeks to identify strong charter applications that have the potential to instill the Wisconsin Idea by incubating new or innovative educational programs to address specific community needs that are currently not being addressed or met, supporting programs that have promise of closing opportunity and achievement gaps, and fostering programs that have the potential to disseminate successful practices among PK-20 education stakeholders.

Mission

The Office of Educational Opportunity's mission, in partnership with community organizations, parents, educators, and dedicated individuals, is to provide options for students and families to access quality educational programs. Through authorizing and overseeing innovative charter schools across Wisconsin, the OEO's goal is to expand access to high-quality educational programs that improve educational outcomes and address local needs, interests, and demands.

New School Priorities

The OEO aims to expand learning opportunities for students in Wisconsin; therefore, we seek high quality new school applications from individuals and groups who have the skill, capacity, and vision to initiate and sustain high quality, innovative public charter schools. Successful applications will present plans that provide all students, including students with disabilities and students identified as English learners, with a quality education that develops the whole child, ensures efficient use of public resources, and demonstrates best practices to close opportunity and achievement gaps.

The OEO will consider charter options when one or more of the following conditions exists in the communities or local school districts the proposal aims to serve:

- A new or innovative educational program grounded in evidence-based practices, that presents educational options to address specific needs that are not being addressed within the district.
- A district has at least one school that received "Fails to Meet Expectations," consistent with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Report Card data for at least two consecutive years. Consideration would only be given to prospectuses which target the grade levels of the district school(s) that Fails to Meet Expectations.

In addition, OEO seeks charter school applications that prioritize the following additional statutory purposes as outlined in WI §118.40 (3m)

- Give preference in awarding contracts for the operation of charter schools other than the charter school established under a contract with the director under sub. (2x) (cm) to those charter schools that serve children at risk, as defined in s. 118.153 (1) (a).

The OEO and Universities of Wisconsin consider the following core values to be essential to the development of charter schools authorized by the OEO:

Innovation: The Educational Program or its essential design elements should be innovative, grounded in research and/or theory, and has been or is likely to be rigorous, engaging, and effective for the anticipated student population.

Incubation: The Educational Program promises to be a leading incubator for new or innovative teaching methods, curricula, organizational design, technologies, and other ways to meet students' diverse needs, enabling school models to be custom-tailored to the specific values, cultures and circumstances of their local communities.

Opportunity: The Educational Program comprehends and responds to the needs, shared challenges, and educational gaps in communities by providing high quality options for students and their families, particularly underserved populations. The proposed charter school population reflects the diversity of the community it plans to serve.

Collaboration: The charter school should be developed with and for the community it plans to serve. The proposed school should demonstrate clear input, interest, and collaboration between and among the families, community members, and local community organizations, including student voice when applicable.

Integrity: The administration and board of directors of the charter school should embody principles of effective leadership and demonstrate the ability to solve complex educational issues to achieve both academic and social outcomes for the students, families and communities it serves.

Phase II: New Charter School Application Guide

Bringing a charter school concept to reality can take up to 24 months of planning. This planning is best accomplished with a team of dedicated and committed individuals/organization that can meet and sustain the rigorous operational and planning requirements. These next pages detail the New School Application process, timeline, and submission requirements. A Phase II application can only be submitted if the applicant's prospectus has been approved by the OEO.

Note that applicants seeking charters for schools serving less than 50 students will be discouraged due to the fiscal challenges of very small enrollment programs.

Before Submitting Phase II: New Charter School Application, applicants must:

1. Schedule a meeting with the OEO Director at cynthia.gonzalez@wisconsin.edu to discuss Phase I: Prospectus feedback and Phase II application process.
2. Provide the OEO with at least three weeks' advance notice of the time, date, and location of community session(s) to be held between September 6, 2025, and January 11, 2026.
3. Become familiar with Wisconsin statutes which govern charter school formation and operation, particularly [118.40 Charter schools](#).
4. Download and carefully review the OEO Phase II: New Charter School Application material

Applicants are highly encouraged to:

5. Visit and connect with The Wisconsin Resource Center for Charter Schools (WRCCS) to learn about chartering in Wisconsin: www.wrccs.org.

New Charter School Application Timeline

The chart below outlines the timeline for OEO's Phase II: New Charter School Application. As all approved applicants are required to have a planning year, the OEO strategically aligns its application timeline with the Wisconsin Charter School Program (WCSP) grant funding cycle. Synchronizing schedules allows prospective independent charter schools to simultaneously apply for WCSP planning year funding. However, it is important to note that applying to WCSP does not mean a school will receive grant funding, therefore, the school should not be dependent on this grant for opening.

Date	Activity
January 12, 2026	Phase II: New Charter School Application Due
January 16, 2026	Applicants are notified if the application was incomplete or will be reviewed by the Application Review Committee.
January 19 - March 2026	Application Review Committee reviews the application.
February - March 2026	Capacity Interview with application team.
April 2026	OEO director shares committee recommendation to the Universities of Wisconsin President for final approval.
No later than May 29, 2026	Applicant notified of the OEO's final decision.

May – June 2026	*If the applicant team receives a ‘Conditional Approval’, the applicant will submit additional documentation for approval during this period.
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Completeness Review

Once applications are submitted to the OEO, they will undergo a review for completeness on the *due* date (not prior to the due date). If submissions are incomplete (i.e., missing responses to required sections, sections left blank, etc.), the submission will be excluded from further review, and the applicant will be required to submit a new application the following year. Applicants will be notified of the completeness or incompleteness of their submission per the New Charter School Application Timeline. Note that the findings of completion are not indicative of the submission's quality.

Capacity Interview

The Application Review Committee and the OEO will conduct a face-to-face interview with key members of the application team (board/founding team), to be scheduled after the application submission deadline. Capacity Interview includes completing a performance task with key members of the founding/board team and an opportunity for the Application Review Committee to ask further questions.

The Review of Applications

The Application Review Committee will evaluate the application using the criteria set forth in Rubric. This evaluation will include a thorough review of the written application, a substantive in-person capacity interview with applicant team, and other due diligence to examine the applicant's experience and capacity. The Application Review Committee must objectively review the extent to which the applicant responds to the criteria and rate according to the indicators of quality. Based on those individual criteria ratings, the evaluator then provides an overall rating for each category in the Rubric. It is appropriate for authorizers to prioritize and weigh certain sections of the application.

The OEO, in consultation with the Application Review Committee, may find that an application substantially meets the requirements outlined in the Rubric, but that additional information is required, or conditions must be met prior to making a recommendation for approval. In such cases, the applicant will receive notice of “Conditional Approval” and will be notified and provided with a deadline to submit additional information. If the applicant does not provide additional information resulting in the application obtaining Overall Section Ratings of “Does Not Meet” in applicable areas of the Rubric, the OEO will not recommend approval.

Applicants whose proposals are approved will be notified and receive instructions for the next steps. Applicants whose proposals are not approved or receive a “Conditional Approval” will also receive notification. The OEO will produce a Phase II Reviewer Guide Report, which compiles the collective findings of the Application Review Committee to share with the applicant team.

To the greatest extent possible, Application Review Committee members should strive to reach consensus on a final recommendation of whether a proposal should or should not be approved for chartering. If consensus is not reached the Director will review recommendations and rationales from reviewers after Capacity Interview and determine the summary recommendation to be made to the Universities of Wisconsin President for final decision.

Planning Year and Pre-Opening Requirements

For applicants whose Phase II proposals are approved, the school opening is contingent on meeting all conditions set forth in the OEO's Pre-Opening Requirements, DPI's Charter School Assurance of Readiness, and the materialization of its proposed educational and organizational model as described in the application. If the school is unable to meet one or more of the conditions set forth in the aforementioned requirements, it will submit a plan detailing how the condition(s) will be accomplished by August 1 of the opening year. In the event the conditions are not met by the deadline, the OEO may, at its own discretion, decide to postpone the opening of the school by one year or terminate the contract. Additionally, if the school fails to substantially meet enrollment projection 60 days prior to the start of the academic year, at the discretion of the OEO Director, the charter may be terminated and/or result in a one-year opening delay. Charter School contracts are finalized and executed during the planning year.

The planning year for a new charter school is typically quite challenging. Successful schools treat this planning year as their top priority, dedicating significant time and resources to meeting requirements that demand careful preparation that cannot be adequately addressed through last-minute efforts. The OEO expects quality submission of material during planning year and will monitor the schools' pre-opening efforts to ensure readiness.

Phase II Application Submission Requirements

Submission of Application

Applicants must send an electronic copy of the application including all attachments in PDF versions via email to cynthia.gonzalez@wisconsin.edu. Once an application is received, applicants will be notified if the application is incomplete or will be reviewed by the Application Review Committee.

Due Date

The New Charter School Application must be submitted via email by January 12, 2026, no later than 5:00 p.m. (CST). No late applications will be accepted. Any application submitted after 5:00 p.m. CST on the last day of the application cycle will be rejected.

Page Limit

The application may not exceed 100 pages in length. Application strength is measured by the quality of content against the Rubric, not its length. Applicants are encouraged to be thorough yet concise. Page limit does not apply to required attachments.

Application Format and Organization

- 8 ½" × 11" page orientation
- 0.5-1" margins on all sides
- 11-12-point font
- Page numbers and name of school in footer on each page
- Attachment must be clearly labeled.

Data

Tables, graphs, and any other data provided in the application must be clearly presented, explained, and directly relevant to the text. Any pictures or graphs that contain text within the picture may be less than 11-point font.

Required Attachments

- ☐ Proposed Discipline Policy
- ☐ Resume/CV of principal/head of school (if identified)
- ☐ Organizational Chart
- ☐ Management agreement or other comprehensive service agreement (if applicable)
- ☐ New Board Member resumes
- ☐ Board by-laws
- ☐ Articles of Incorporation
- ☐ Facility MOU or other proof of intent to secure a specific facility (if applicable)
- ☐ Revenue and expenditure budget for the first five years of operation and planning year
(Applicants must use the five-year budget template provided by OEO).