

How to open a charter school in Mississippi.

Charter schools are free public schools that are open to all Mississippi students. Public charter schools are a part of a broad school reform strategy to improve the quality of education for Mississippi children. This guide will help you through the important charter application process from conception of the school mission through sustainable operation. It is important to complete each step in consecutive order. A strong charter school application takes between 9-12 months to prepare.

1. PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION

TIME: 1-2 years before application submission

Establish a resourceful and dedicated founding team that consists of multiple parents, community members, educators, business persons, or other stakeholders.

Identify community demand for a charter school and what one would mean in your targeted community. How would it impact the community? What would enrollment look like?

Spend time researching charter schools and best practices. Take time to review Mississippi's charter law and policies.

Develop networks of community leaders, local legislators, and other key figures in the community in order to garner support for your charter school.

Begin drafting the vision, mission, and goals for your school. Think about who can personify these values; recruit a school leader.

2. DEVELOP A PLAN

TIME: 6 months to 1 year before application submission

Meet with a representative of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board (Authorizer). Your relationship with the Authorizer is critical to the founding, start-up, and operational stages of your charter school and will create a positive environment for success.

Access charitable registration paperwork from the Secretary of State's office, and begin working on 501c3 paperwork from the IRS. Seek out a pro bono attorney to assist with the development and submission of this legal paperwork.

Begin crafting specific educational and organizational components of the school. Write a business plan for the school that serves as the foundation for the school's non-educational programming and organizational structure (classes, grade levels, enrollment).

Access resources from the Mississippi Charter Schools Association.

3. DRAFT & SUBMIT APPLICATION

TIME: About 90 days to finalize and submit plan

Take your time completing your plan. Review past applications and collaborate with current charter schools to identify resources for use in writing the application. Be sure to follow instructions.

Be aware of deadlines and leave time for final edits.

Know that the founding board is responsible for all information provided in the application and will be bound to the information in the public review process.

Recognize the final stage of the application process requires the charter school founding board to prepare to effectively respond to the Authorizer. Seek commitments from the entire founding board to attend all meetings regarding the application set by the Authorizer.

4. APPLICATION REVIEW

TIME: At least 2 weeks

Understand that the Authorizer has 180 days from the day you file to approve or deny the application and that the Authorizer must submit a report for public record explaining its decision on your application.

Decide whether to reapply if the Authorizer denies your application.

Know the Authorizer may approve an application with conditions.

Sign a five-year contract between the governing board of the school and the Authorizer for all approved applications.

5. MOVING FORWARD

TIME: 9 months to 1 year for start-up

Formalize your plans according to the charter contract and work towards renewal from Day One.

Apply for start-up grants from private foundations or the federal charter school program to allow for your school to acquire equipment, supplies, and instructional materials for the first day.

Start recruiting, hiring, training, and preparing your staff for the year. Take time to train your board, as well as review and finalize bylaws and policies.

Market your school in the community which you will be serving.

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